
Nuns, rotten boys and rotten girls

The gendered representations of nerd identities in Japanese women's comics

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Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Background and Terminology	6
2.1. Overview of Japanese gender history in the modern era	6
2.2. Overview of manga history and status in Japanese society	11
2.3. Japanese nerd identities and names given to them	14
2.3.1. Otaku オタク	14
2.3.2. Fujoshi 腐女子	17
2.3.3. Fudanshi 腐男子	19
3. Literature Review	21
3.1. Theories	21
3.2. Female-oriented manga and nerd identities	23
4. Methods and Data	25
4.1. Methods	25
4.2. Data	26
5. Analysis	32
5.1. Non-fujoshi otaku women	33
5.1.1. The nuns of Kuragehime	33
5.1.2. Genders and love in Kuragehime	39
5.1.3. Gamer otaku girl	44
5.1.4. Comparing Wotakoi and Kuragehime	46
5.2. Fujoshi	48
5.2.1. High school life of fujoshi	48
5.2.2. Fujoshi in the office	57
5.2.3. Other fujoshi	58
5.2.4. Rotten girls in heterosexual relationships	59

5.3. Otaku men.....	65
5.3.1. Wotakoi and salaryman otaku	66
5.3.2. The stereotypical otaku of Watamote.....	68
5.3.3. The non-otaku otaku of Kuragehime.....	71
5.3.4. Otaku men loving rotten women	72
5.4. Fudanshi.....	75
5.4.1. Fudanshi in same-sex love	75
5.4.2. Heterosexual fudanshi	81
5.4.3. Comparisons between the types of fudanshi, and with fujoshi	84
6. Conclusion.....	87
7. References	90
8. List of Figures	98
9. Vocabulary Appendix	99
10. Pictorial Appendix of the characters in the data	102



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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract</p> <p>Tutkin japanilaisissa tyttöjen ja naisten sarjakuvissa esiintyviä sukupuolittuneita nörtti-identiteettejä ja niiden representaatioita. Japanissa on useita erilaisia nörtti-identiteettejä, jotka on jaoteltu pääosin sukupuolen ja kiinnostusten kohteiden mukaan. Tutkielmassani tarkastelen otaku, fujoshi ja fudanshi -tyyppien edustajia. Otaku on kattotermi nörteille, mutta viittaa stereotyyppisesti heteroseksuaalisesti epäonnistuneeseen ja sosiaalisesti kyvyttömään miesnörttiin. Termi voi myös viitata naisnörtteihin. Fujoshi viittaa japanilaisesta naisille suunnatusta homoeroottisesta viihteestä kiinnostuneeseen naiseen ja sen suora käänös on mätä tyttö. Fudanshi on johdettu fujoshista ja viittaa biologiseen mieheen, joka harrastaa edellä mainittua stereotyyppisesti naisten viihteeksi miellettyä homoeroottiikkaa, sen suora käänös on mätä poika / mies. Kaikki nämä erilaiset nörtit ovat kärsineet huonosta maineesta japanilaisessa valtavirta-ajattelussa ja stereotyyppisesti heidät on nähty poikkeavina ja sukupuolensa epäonnistuneina edustajina, joiden on vaikea päästä naimisiin tai saada töitä. Tutkimus perehtyy näiden kategorioiden kuvaukseen ja niiden kautta ilmeneviä mahdollisia muutoksia niin ajattelussa nörttejä kohtaan kuin normatiivisessa sukupuolellisessa käytöksessä ja odotuksissa.</p> <p>Aineisto koostuu kuudesta 2000–2010 luvuilla ilmestyneestä, suositusta naisten tai tyttöjen mangasta: Kuragehime, (Akiko Higashimura), Watashi ga motete dōsunda (Junko), Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii (Fujita), Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu (Atami Michinoku), Sasaki to Miyano (Shō Harusono) ja Mashita no fudanshi-kun (Chihaya Kuroiwa), joiden kaikkien pää- ja sivuhahmoina esiintyy erilaisten nörttikategorioiden hahmoja. Sarjakuvien tarinat ovat luonteeltaan romanttisia, Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu'a lukuun ottamatta, sillä naisten ja tyttöjen manga on pääsääntöisesti rakkaustarinoinhin nojaavaa, minkä lisäksi romanttiset suhteet paljastavat seksuaalisesti kyvyttöminä pidettyjen nörttikategorioiden konfliktin heteronormatiivisen yhteiskunnan kanssa.</p> <p>Tutkimus keskittyy erityisesti naisnäkökulmaan, vaikka kaikki tutkimusaineiston nörtit eivät ole naisia, tutkimus keskittyy erityisesti nais-otakuihin fujoshien ohella. Fudanshit asettuvat stereotyyppisesti feminiiniseksi miellettyyn kategoriaan, joten he paljastavat osaltaan heteronormatiivisen yhteiskunnan rakenteita.</p> <p>Teoreettinen perusta tutkimukselle on Judith Butlerin teoria sukupuolen performatiivisuudesta, sukupuolen toistamisesta ja sukupuolellisesta ymmärrettävyydestä. Japanilaiset nörttikategoriat paljastavat ulkopuolisuudellaan sukupuolen rakentuneen ja epä-essentiaalisen luonteen. Tämän lisäksi heteronormatiivisen yhteiskuntarakenteen kanssa konfliktissa olevat nörtti-identiteetit vastustavat valtavirtaiseen sukupuoliperformanssiin osallistumista.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksena on, että valtavirtayhteiskunnan kanssa konfliktissa olevat nörtit eivät parane poikkeavasta identiteetistään rakkauden voimalla ja assimiloitu valtavirtaan, vaan he pystyvät yhdistämään poikkeavan identiteettinsä ja suhteet toisiin ihmisiin. Nähtävissä on myös normatiivisen avioliittokeskeisyyden rapautumista ja parisuhderakeneteiden monipuolistumista. Suurin osa nörteistä joutuu kuitenkin pitämään identiteettinsä salaisuutena laajemmalla yhteiskunnalla.</p>		
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1. Introduction

The ubiquitous nature of Japanese comics, or manga as it is most often known, can be hard to grasp for a Westerner, for nowhere in the western world is comic culture so prominently a part of the visual, physical and psychological landscape as it is in Japan. The pervasiveness of Japanese comic culture is unique in a global context: the sheer amount of comics published overshadows the other big comic countries by far. Annual sales of only printed comics, as the numbers for digital comics are not given, in Japan in the year 2016 with magazines and comic books (*tankōbon*¹ in Japanese) combined was just a bit under 300 billion yen (ca. 2.2 billion euros at the exchange rate of 1.1.2016) according to the National Association of Publishers (Kokkai Shuppansha Kyōkai 2017). For comparison, the annual sales of comics in both paper and digital format in 2016 in the USA and Canada combined was ca. 1.085 billion dollars (ca. 990 million euros at the exchange rate of 1.1.2016 (Comichron 2017).

Even today, with the peak of the western manga boom already nigh a decade behind us and manga sales in gradual decline in Japan too (Kokkai Shuppansha Kyōkai, 2017), manga remains a popular and a multifaceted subject of research. In its stories and art, manga has a substantial role in shaping the cultural landscape of Japan and the possibilities the readers comprehend they have: in the 1970s rioting students in Japan drew inspiration from manga and *gekiga*² (Kinsella 2000, 31-32), a popular sports manga causes a boom in the sports it represents (Itō in MacWilliams 2008, 67), just to give a few examples. Manga has the power to change, or to stagnate, the worlds of its readers. By studying manga, one can study Japanese society and the struggles and changes it is currently undergoing. Indeed, some scholars have gone as far as to say one cannot comprehend contemporary Japanese culture without understanding manga (Maynard 2002, 243, Ingulsrud and Allen 2010, 69).

Building upon the tradition of manga studies in Japan and in the English speaking academia, this study aims to seek a wider understanding of the changes happening in Japanese society through the popular culture it creates. Japan has struggled with similar issues that Finland and other post-industrial capitalist societies have in the 2000s: aging and declining population, youth unemployment, environmental issues and the uneasiness that emancipation of women has caused

¹ I have added an appendix of terms to the end of this study to make referencing the Japanese words used here easier for a reader not fluent in Japanese and manga jargon

² 劇画 Dramatic pictures in English. Another type of Japanese comics, where the art and stories tend to be grittier and drawn in a more realistic manner.

in gendered relations once deemed the traditional cultural order (see for example Kawano et. al. 2014, Rosenberger 2013 and McLelland and Dasgupta 2005).

This study delves into the last mentioned, and into manga stories women tell to each other known as *josei* and *shōjo manga* in Japanese. The focus will be on characters presented as different types of nerds: *otaku* (オタク), *fujoshi* (腐女子) and *fudanshi* (腐男子). The category of nerds is a category of people deviating from the expectations given to genders, and often they are considered as people unfit for love and outside of proper adulthood in the eyes of the mainstream society. Romance plays a big part in most of these stories, this is in part due to the fact that *shōjo* and *josei* manga often are romantic stories, but also due to the fact that the normative structures of gender and sex are often laid bare when love and sexuality come into the picture, as they are regulated by gender and the heteronormative structure of society.

The theoretical background of this thesis is Judith Butler's thoughts on the situatedness, intelligibility and performativity of gender (Butler 1990 and 2004). Butler's theory is expanded with the concept coercive gendering that is done unto others by Barbara Czarniawska in her 2006 article. Czarniawska sees popular culture as a way of distilling societal narratives, streamlining the chaotic and often non-linear reality of the actual world into stories that can give direction and guidance, and thus help the readers frame reality (Czarniawska 2006, 249). Butler also writes on the importance of fantasy, and its subversive potential, for things that can be imagined can also be made into reality (2004, 28-29).

My research delves into following questions: In what ways are the different gendered nerd identities performed in the manga? How do the characters in these categories interact with normatively identified characters or other nerds? How do the outsider identities face hegemonic heteronormativity: do they manage to challenge and subvert it or will they be subjugated into normalcy in the end?

The structure of this thesis is as follows: in chapter 2 I will sketch out a background of Japanese society from the viewpoint of gender roles and the changes they have gone over in the 20th century to give a context for the thesis. I will also give a short history of manga and try to define the different Japanese nerd identities that are the subject of this study. In chapter 3 I will overview past research into women's manga, the different nerd identities and delve into Butler's theories in detail. In the 4th chapter I will elaborate upon my methods and introduce the manga that forms the data of this

thesis. 5th chapter is a detailed analysis of the data. The chapter is divided into several subchapters according to the gendered divisions of nerds. In the 6th chapter I will present my conclusions and prospects of further study.

2. Background and Terminology

To sketch out a context for this study, a short introduction of history and currents of gender roles in contemporary Japanese society is given, as is to the history and development of josei and shōjo manga. In addition, a brief etymology and a description to the three main nerd categories of this study: otaku, fujoshi and fudanshi are also given.

2.1. Overview of Japanese gender history in the modern era

Gender roles and expectations have gone through many major changes in Japan during the 20th century. As this study focuses more on women, so will this overview, but men will not be completely overlooked.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the female ideal of the time was *ryōsai kenbo*³ or “good wife, wise mother”, which shows how a female’s main duty in life was to raise productive citizens (Karppinen in Jalagin and Konttinen 2004, 172). This ideal did not spring from thin air: motherhood and child rearing was already the backbone of the feudal samurai society of the Edo period (1600-1868) and before. Now the mothers also needed to be well educated as well as to work outside of the home in wage labour to speed up the nation’s modernisation (Czarnecki in Miller and Bardsley 2005, 49-52).

The end of the feudal world order and a turn towards rapid westernisation and industrialisation shook Japanese masculinity in the end of the 19th century. New masculine ideals were imported from the West and mixed up with feudal military traditions of *bushidō*. In this process militarisation was an important aspect of early 20th century male ideals. (Low in Kam and Morris 2003, 82-83)

During the Taishō period (1912-1926), women began organising themselves into women’s rights groups in order to advocate their right to participate in politics, owning property etc. Industrialisation, urbanisation and the influx of American popular culture into Japan helped this process along with wage labour outside of the home, giving the women some monetary independence. Of course, this development came with a general moral panic about the societal

³ 良妻賢母

threat of women's abandonment of household and familial duties in the process. (Jalagin and Konttinen 2004, 42-46)

The emancipatory progress of Taishō was thwarted with the rise of militarist and anti-feminist power during the 1920s and 1930s. Women were forced back to the role of *ryōsai kenbo*, whose sole duty was to produce sons to be sent to Japan's frontiers (McLelland 2005, 32-34). During this time the indoctrination of Japanese men into the military and state *shintō* patriotism reached its peak as Japan slid towards the Pacific War (1941-1945) (Low in Kam and Morris 2003, 85-86).

After Japan lost, American occupation changed Japanese society quickly and drastically. Women were given the right to vote, eligibility for parliamentary candidacy and personal self-determination, rights that have been used with mixed success (Jalagin and Konttinen 2004, 47-49). Japanese men faced a turn from soldiers to corporate warriors, and the hegemonic masculinity took on the shape of a tireless salaryman working for the sake of his heterosexual nuclear family and the prosperity of the nation. However, it is important to note that this ideal, as powerful as it is and has been, has always been but a minor portion of the actual working men in Japan. (Dasgupta in Kam and Morris, 2003, 118-19)

Another shift in values during the 20th century was a turn towards appreciating virginity in prospective wives. Before the period of westernisation Japanese culture did not strictly enforce such values, in the lower stratas of society especially, within the elite chastity was enforced more strictly. Already during the Edo era women of Japan were categorised into two groups: the child-giving mothers of the elite and sex-giving prostitutes, who hailed from the peasantry and were seen as naturally inclined towards wantonness. (Leupp 2003 45-48 & 222) Nevertheless, these prostitutes could very well end up married with children after their career, as there was no social stigmatisation of prostitutes (ibid. 43). This practice did not vanish with westernisation and industrialisation (McLelland 2005, 35), but the category of the chaste would-be mothers extended to a far larger portion of the population than before. They needed to take care of and guard their bodies to keep them in top mothering condition even more closely than before, and their chastity was of great societal concern (Ryang 2006, 87-94, McLelland in Johnson-Woods 2010, 78). The only purposes of acceptable female sexuality became reproduction (in the case of mothers) or the satisfying of male sex drive (in the case of prostitutes) and the thought of feminine desire of sex just for pleasure's sake was absent from public thought (McLelland 2005, 36-38, McLelland 2000a, 67-68). While

during Edo period women had at least some level of sexual agency: visiting prostitutes and kabuki actors was not entirely unheard of, for example (Leupp 1995, 187-188).

Pre-modern Japan also had no moral prohibition against male same-sex sexual acts. In fact it was an important aspect of the feudal samurai culture. (Pflugfelder 1999, Leupp 1995, Watanabe and Iwata 1989,) After Japan began its modernisation progress the concept of male-male sexuality changed and there was even a legislative prohibition of homosexual acts, but it was a short lived law during the Meiji period (1868-1911), from 1873 to 1881. The concept of homosexuality as a sexual identity and having a deviant nature from a perceived heterosexual “normalcy” are western imports (McLelland 2000a, 22-25, Watanabe and Iwata, 1989, 11). Due to this, there is a gap between what western people perceive as “being gay” and what Japanese same-sex desiring people are, identify as and do, but as western ideas are taking more and more hold in Japan this gap is diminishing (McLelland 2000a, 11-12, McLelland 2005, 5-8). With this historical background, the social stigma of homosexual acts as a sin or a threat to social order is not as horrible as it tends to be in the Christian West⁴, but life choices deviating from the (married) hetero-nuclear family face a lot of difficulties and pressure in Japanese society (McLelland in McLelland and Dasgupta 2005, 96-110, Shibun 2016). A survey done in 2006 reported that 71% of the gay/bi/questioning identified Japanese men experienced anxiety due to their non-normative identity and 15% had attempted suicide (Hidaka and Operario 2006).

After a short period of recuperation after the Pacific War, Japan launched into an economic growth miracle improving the living standards of Japanese people with a rapid pace. The progress reached its pinnacle in the 1980s’ bubble economy. The salaryman ideal gained power as the hegemonic mold of masculinity: a father’s sole purpose in familial life was to produce the economic basis for the family, his effort was not needed in the actual running of the household. Female ideal was that of the housewife who dropped out of work life to fully focus on the project of child rearing. Heterosexual nuclear took the place of the old multi-generational family as the hegemonic ideal for family structure (Long in Kawano et. al. 2014, 187-189, Ronald and Alexy 2011, 4-6). The male and

⁴ For example, there has not been and is no vocal or violent religious resistance to homosexuality, nor a threat of violence from the police authorities at that (McLelland 2005, 159-160). The Japanese entertainment also has had and still has openly homosexual and transgender entertainers (tarento in Japanese), who often adhere to a narrow stereotype of how homosexuals and transgender people look and behave, though. (McLelland 2000a, 40) The lack of vocal resistance does not equal an absence of violence towards sexual minorities unfortunately, for example 1999-2000 there was a string of muggings of gay men at a popular cruising spot in Tōkyō that resulted in one death (Matsubara, 2000)

female spheres of life were effectively separated from each other as parents rarely even saw each other, turning a family into a project that the parents both worked on in their separate fronts (Ryang 2006, 88-89, and Kawano et.al. 2014, 15).

Equal Employment Opportunity Law was passed in 1985 (effective from 1986), which in theory opened all previously male-only work to women (Matanle et.al. 2014, 473). In practice not that many women were given the opportunity or even were able to take the "career track" intended for male salarymen, for it entailed, among other things, the expectation of voluntary overtime work, compulsory geographical transfers and after work socialising, which would hamper family life excessively (Prough 2011, 92 and Matanle et. al 2014, 477). Some managed to achieve a career while others reigned over the bank accounts of their working husbands as the caretakers of the household, and thus the spending power of women increased in the 1980s (Skov and Moeran 1995, 40-41). With this development the 1980s saw a gradual resurfacing of female sexuality and women as sexual beings, also apart from men, more of which in the next chapter (Itō 2010, 84-86).

During the 1990s and early 2000s many new gender equality laws concerning both work life and the domestic sphere were legislated (Kano 2011, 42), but the aim was not purely egalitarian for a definite undercurrent of boosting the declining birthrate loomed behind this movement (ibid. 50). In effect, the legislation did not help ease the familial burden placed on women all that much, and furthermore there was a severe backlash on these changes and more generally the societal changes of recent decades from the part of conservative elements, who picked feminism as their special target (ibid. 51-52). Even now women often have to choose between family life or career. Some try to fit both in their life, effectively doubling their workload (Rosenberger 2013). Generally speaking, men still find it difficult to participate in household chores: before it was enough to bring home the money, now they are expected to actually participate in the housework and in raising their children (Mathews in Kawano et.al 2014, Dasgupta in McLelland and Dasgupta 2005). Expectations and reality do not meet in this part of familial life in Japan, and so far women still shoulder a lion's share of the household and child rearing burden.

These economic and societal shifts have led to many women choosing to delay marriage (and some have abandoned the idea completely) in order to enjoy the brief period of respite between studies and starting a family (Nakano in Ronald and Alexy 2011, 140). The average age for marriage has been on a steady rise from the latter 1950s to this day: a rise of mean age of 23 for first marriage to 29.4 years for first marriage in the year 2016 for women, and from 25.9 in 1950 to 31.1 years old

for men (Statistics Bureau 2017, 18). For comparison, the average age for first marriage for women in Finland in 2016 was at 31.4 years old, and for men 33.7 (Tilastokeskus 2017). In her study of women in Japan Rosenberger dubs this phenomena as a part of long-term and ambiguous resistance, one that does not challenge the societal framework directly, but stretches it as far as one dares (Rosenberger 2013).

The nerds who are in the focus of my study also fall close to this category. While many fujoshi are students or working women, and keep their fujoshihood hidden, many of them and other nerds remain unmarried (Galbraith 2011a and Okabe and Ishida in Itō et.al 2012). A part of the real life nerds, and some of my research subjects fit into the category of NEETs (an abbreviation of Not in Education, Employment or Training) or freeters⁵, i.e. working only part time sometimes by own volition (a term coined in Japan in the 1980s and it had a positive connotation, but has then turned much more negative in tone (more on freeters in Cook 2012, 58-81)). The burst of the bubble economy and the two decade recession that has followed has left more and more people outside of the old ideal of permanent employment and housewifery, making prospects of marriage also more difficult to those who do not manage to get a career track job, or a husband with one (Cook 2012, 59).

One must also keep in mind that marriage as an institution enjoys a more vital role in a person's life and societal status in Japan, as it does for example in Finland. People who do not marry are often viewed as deviants or somehow lacking, and can find themselves in the fringes of mainstream society (Rosenberger 2013, Nakano 2011, and Nakano in Kawano et.al. 2014 163-165). This goes for both men and women: for example the careers of unmarried salarymen are often thwarted as they do not get promotions (Dasgupta in McLelland and Dasgupta 2005, 173) and women find themselves jobless or fighting for dead end jobs as they pass the marriageable age (Nakano in Kawano et.al. 2014). Common-law marriages are also rare.

The need to marry is often a big source of stress, not only for heterosexuals but also to same-sex desiring people who feel an intense pressure to marry against their orientation into a heterosexual nuclear family, in part to not disappoint their parents and in part to be able to survive in mainstream

⁵ A definition of freeter from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is from 2007: "a person aged 15-34, graduate in the case of male, graduate and unmarried in the case of female (1) for those currently employed, who are treated as part-time or *arbeit* worker by their employer, (2) for those currently unemployed, who seek part-time and *arbeit* jobs and (3) for those currently employed, who are neither engaged in household duties, attending educational institutions nor wanting to start a new job, and wish to find part-time and *arbeit* jobs " (Cook 2012, 63) underlining is my own.

society. It needs to be noted, that the image of the salaryman and his nuclear family is by no means the only option available to a Japanese male, or a female at that, it is just the one that enjoys the greatest status by far (McLelland 2000a, 215-216, McLelland and Dasgupta 2005, 96).

It can be said that the people who cannot or refuse to marry remain in a childlike state in the mindset of Japanese society, only with marriage and heterosexual nuclear family, does a person truly attain their adulthood, the status of *ichininmae no shakaijin*⁶ (Dasgupta in McLelland and Dasgupta 2005, 172-176, Cook 2012, 76-78, Rosenberger 2013). This is an important thing to keep in mind when one looks at Japanese society through Butlerian lense: a certain sex is definitely is not enough to win a place in the category of an “(adult) man” or an “(adult) woman”.

2.2. Overview of manga history and status in Japanese society

Manga, as in mainstream Japanese comics, has grown during the 20th century to be a billion euro industry, which peaked during the mid-1990s when the most popular magazine *Shūkan Shōnen Jampū* sold over 6 million copies per week (Kinsella, 2000, 43). The sales have since declined, but manga has maintained its position as a veritable part in Japanese popular culture even in the digitalised 21st century, slowly migrating to online platforms too.

Early forms of manga were born in the late 19th and early 20th century when western caricatures and early comics came to Japan and mixed with the Edo period popular visual art. As a form of visual expression it truly blossomed after the Pacific War, but was an important part of Japanese cultural landscape already before and during it. A watershed work is considered to be *Shin Takarajima* (New Treasure Island, 1947) by Tezuka Osamu⁷ (1928-1989), who is often dubbed the God of Manga. Shin Takarajima and Tezuka's subsequent works had an immense impact on the visual storytelling and style of contemporary manga, even if his influence has been somewhat exaggerated. (Itō in MacWilliams 2008, 29-38 and Bouissou in Johnson-Woods 2010, 23-28) Manga industry bloomed with Japan's booming economy after the war. Tezuka is often dubbed also as the creator of shōjo manga, but its roots go much farther, into prewar girls' magazines, illustrators working for them and Takarazuka all-female revue shows, which influenced Tezuka too (Shamoon 2012, 87-89).

⁶一人前の社会人: a person who is considered a true adult. In the case of a man has a steady job and is married with children, and in the case of a woman married with children

⁷ I will write Japanese names in the traditional Japanese way: surname first

1970s saw the revolution of girls' manga, which had thus far been drawn mostly by men who could not really understand the psychology of young girls (Itō 2010, 50). This changed when young women artists who had grown up reading Tezuka's work marched to the scene. The shōjo manga revolution is often personified in a group of artists named the *24nen gumi*⁸ whose work also consisted of the birth of the *shōnen ai*⁹ genre of manga: love stories between ethereally beautiful young androgynous boys, known in Japanese as *bishōnen*¹⁰. Their work was dark, psychological, filled with tragedy and completely novel. Shōnen ai became the foundation upon which contemporary boys' love manga, or BL for short, was built upon (Itō 2010, 70-72, Welker in McLelland et.al. 2015, 44-45).

During the 1980s manga gained more popularity and legitimacy as a form of entertainment. During this decade adult women's comics, i.e. josei manga and ladies' comics¹¹ were born, gained much popularity (magazines peaked at over 100 different titles) and readers previously outside of the old shōjo reader demographic began flocking to it. The bubble economy, an increase in women working outside of their homes, the postponing of marriage and a shift towards acceptance of women as sexual entities with desires of their own all helped to create this boom. A considerable part of the 1980s ladies' comics was heterosexual pornography, sometimes with hardcore S/M themes, and such pornography is still a viable part of ladies' comics even today. (Itō 2010, 73-76) This was also the decade when self-published manga (known as *dōjinshi*¹² in Japanese) flourished. When drawn by women they were often homoerotic and pornographic in nature. This *dōjinshi* culture solidified the now rigid pairing structure of BL: in almost every story there is a pair and one of them is the *seme*¹³ and other the *uke*¹⁴ denoting their sexual positions. The absoluteness of this structure has led many critics blaming BL of heterosexism and hijacking of gay culture to entertain such sexist fantasies. (Nagaike and Aoyama in McLelland et.al 2015, 124, Lunsing 2006)

⁸ The Group of year 24, an allusion to the fact that they were all born around Shōwa 24, or year 1949.

⁹ 少年愛 A literal translation is boys' love, but shōnen ai refers to a different genre of male-male erotica than BL.

¹⁰ 美少年 A literal translation is beautiful boy.

¹¹ *Rediisu Komikku* (レディース・コミック) in Japanese. The differentiation between josei manga and ladies' comics is vague, as both refer to comics aimed at adult women. Ladies' comics seems to allude more to the hetero-pornographic side of adult women's manga and the more realistic stories aimed for housewives and older, married women (see Itō 2010). Whereas josei manga is more varied in stories and themes, and seems to denote readers in their twenties and early thirties. As my data has no clear Ladies' Comics in it, I will use the term josei manga in my thesis to denote the series that are aimed towards readership over the shōjo age.

¹² 同人誌 *dōjinshi* are self-published magazines or comics, which resemble western zines, fan zines and small press independent comics.

¹³ 攻め, which is Japanese for attacker.

¹⁴ 受け, which is Japanese for receiver.

After the recession of the 1990s began, many a manga magazine folded, but shōnen (boys') and shōjo manga managed to flourish, as did BL. (Hetero)romantic shōjo manga began to tackle with more sexualised themes during this time too, even if heterosexual bed scenes had not been entirely unheard of before either (Shamoon in Williams 2004, 82). The heroines of these manga were often presented as tomboyish and brave, and the stories were also increasingly tied to everyday issues in Japan, not a distant, exotic land (Prough 2011, 113-114), much in the vein of ladies' comics. These brave, assertive girls stand in a rather stark contrast to the reclusive and secretive otaku stereotypes this study focuses on.

Contemporary magazine manga is most often first serialised in a weekly, bi-monthly or a monthly magazine, where in each issue there is a collection of one shot stories and/or chapters of ongoing series. The magazines engage readers very actively, asking for feedback of the stories. Series or magazines with dwindling popularity get ruthlessly cut, and series or magazines under such pressure make adjustments to content and plots of the manga to avoid being cancelled (Itō 2010, 114, Prough 2011 57-59). Therefore, it is also important to remember when reading and studying manga, that the story does not only spring from a vision that an independent artist has cultivated into a visionary piece. It is a product of negotiation between the artist, their editor and the active readership (Kinsella 2000, 8-10, Prough 2011, 55-56 and 71, Galbraith 2016, 220-221).

A step apart from this are comics read online, the popularity of which has been on the rise in the 2010s. Services like Pixiv Komikku¹⁵, where many of the manga I examine are published, have not been studied from this perspective yet, and trying to determine the amount of effect online feedback or editorial pressure towards the *mangaka*¹⁶ behind the scenes has on their work is beyond the scope of this study. One can tentatively assume that all of the web comics studied in this thesis are "magazine manga -enough" as all have been turned also into paper tankōbon.

In the case of this study the aforementioned symbiotic relationship between readers and mangaka can be an asset rather than a liability, for we can put more trust into the fact that these representations of otaku, fujoshi and fudanshi have resonated with a solid readership as all of the

¹⁵ Pixiv Komikku URL: <https://comic.pixiv.net/> is an online comic portal of the popular Japanese art sharing site Pixiv, where online comics are gathered into digital versions of the traditional manga magazines, even if the comics are not published simultaneously. Some are published in cooperation with publishing houses, while others have sprung from independent creators from Pixiv itself, one being Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii (Anime News Network 2017a and 2017b)

¹⁶ マンガ家 The creator of manga, who is usually responsible of both art and plot of the story. As there is no fitting English translation to this term I will use the term in my thesis.

manga are successful. On the other hand it can lead to the stories emphasizing stereotypical characterisation, conformist plotlines etc. in order to amuse the readers, even ridicule the otaku presented in the story. Japanese comics, and entertainment over all, are often very character type-oriented, where certain character types appear as nigh identical renders of each other from story to story. (For a few examples of different types of ukes and semes see Fujimoto in McLelland et.al. 2015, 85, or the narrow stereotype in which homosexual entertainers have to fit in McLelland 2000a, 39)

It is also important to note, that while the general types of manga with the distinction of target audiences are separated by both age and gender, they do not represent the actual readership of the comics. People of all ages and genders can and often do enjoy reading manga that is not “targeted for them”, rather the distinction is more of an aesthetic one than a gender-age one (Kinsella 2000, 48). This is to alleviate the gendered binarity into which such distinctions seem to lead, as there are more gender identities than those of mere men and women. I do not wish to undermine this fact with using the general categories of manga that are used here to taxonomize Japanese comics.

The categorisation acts as a form of self-identification, according to Prough in her book on shōjo manga, the readers participate in girls’ culture via engrossing themselves in the world of girls’ comics (Prough 2011, 3-6). This identification does not need to have a connection to the biological sex of the reader, however, as for example adult men also enjoy reading shōjo manga (Itō 2010, 70, Galbraith 2015, 207-209). This is also true in the case of the fudanshi who lack the female genitalia too often deemed necessary for the ability to enjoy BL.

2.3. Japanese nerd identities and names given to them

In Japanese there are several different terms for nerds with different kinds of special interests and/or gender identities. Some are more specific, others more general, most overlap and all are challenging to define exactly.

2.3.1. Otaku オタク

Otaku is the most commonly used term for a nerd within Japan and also outside of it. At least in theory it also has the widest meaning. As a term for a person, otaku is most often used about males.

In the 1980s otaku was coined and popularised in the context of *lolicon*¹⁷ magazines which focused on adolescent girl characters drawn in cute shōjo manga style sometimes, but not always, in erotic poses or encounters. The majority of readers of these magazines and comics were male, and so the name was tied to the male sex, deviant sexuality and an air of failed heterosexual performance from the beginning (Lien, 73 and Yamanaka, 38, in Galbraith et.al 2015).

As a word it derives from a formal way of addressing someone as you (お宅)¹⁸, which is said to refer to the formal way in which these socially awkward male nerds spoke to each other (Kinsella 1998, 311). It is a multi-faceted name, one that has fluctuating connotations and meanings within and outside of Japan (Eng in Itō et.al 2012, 85, Condry 2013, 187-190). It can be seen as a labelling, something with which to separate a category of them from us: normal people from deviants. Nevertheless, what "otaku" is or is not has been a matter of debate ever since the term was coined and the debate is still ongoing (with entire books written on the topic, see for example Galbraith et. al 2015).

Otaku as a name for a group has suffered from a bad reputation historically, especially after an 'otaku moral panic' was instilled by the mainstream media after a serial killer of little girls, Miyazaki Tsutomu, was caught in 1989. In the early 1990s tabloid press and TV shows labelled him as an otaku due to him owning anime videos and lolicon magazines (Kinsella 1998, 312 and Kamm in Galbraith et.al. 2015, 51-65). In the late 1990s and early 2000s the stigmatisation of the word has lessened in Japan with more positive media representation (Lien in Galbraith et. al. 2015, 75). But even now, the term still carries the feeling of someone who obsesses over unreal things, out of touch of the everyday social reality and withdrawn from social life (Itō et. al. 2012, xxi and Lien in Galbraith et.al. 2015, 74). While in fact many otaku have very active social lives within their own circles (Saitō 2009, 155). It seems that the types of social lives that matter in the mainstream are also very limited,

¹⁷ Lolicon, *lolicom* or *rorikon* as a straight Romanization of the word ロリコン, is short for Lolita-complex. The consumers of lolicon are mainly men even today. See Kinsella 2000, 121-124 and Galbraith 2011b, 83-114 and 2015, 205-215.

¹⁸ Literal meaning of the word is a house or a residence, therefore the name also has a connotation of someone who is tied to their home and reluctant to venture outside. Nowadays, when speaking of the type of people known as otaku usually the word is written in katakana (オタク) or sometimes wotaku (ヲタク) like in the title of *Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii*. It is also possible to write otaku in hiragana (おたく) but the usage is dated and derives from the original negative labelling of otaku in the 1980s, thus emphasizing the derogatory flair of the word (Okada in Galbraith et. al 2015, 164).

marking the othered group of otaku as antisocial¹⁹. The non-flattering stereotype of otaku is that their outward demeanour is unkempt, ugly and often overweight, (see for example the depiction of otaku written by the creator of the term otaku Nakamori Akio translated and quoted by Yamanaka in Galbraith et.al. 2015, 36) and they lack manners.

Female otaku can be called for example otakuonna (オタク女) or otakujoshi (オタク女子) to separate them from their male counterparts, but it is not uncommon to see otaku used as a genderless moniker for all nerds, as we will see in the analysis. Therefore, the group to which otaku refers is very particular to the context where it is used.

Outside of Japan otaku tends to have a less of a negative meaning, and the term is almost always related to people who are obsessed with anime and manga (Eng in Itō et. al 2012, 87-88 and Condry 2013, 188). In Japan otaku is a wider term that can be attached to many forms of obsession, be it manga, jellyfish, trains or dolls, usually each subculture has its own otaku-derived name. For example in *Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii* one of the main characters is labelled a *geewota* (ゲーヲタ, gamer otaku, gee referring to *geemu* which is Japanese for games) and in *Kuragehime* one of the supporting otaku women is labelled *tetsuota* (鉄オタ, train otaku, the *tetsu* being the first kanji in the word for railway in Japanese: 鉄道 *tetsudō*).

For the purpose of this study, which does not focus on the real life otaku per sé, but on how the representation of such a category is given in manga, I will focus on those who are either identified or self-identify as otaku in the stories. There are several different types of otaku in the manga studied, on top of which, there are also a few characters who could but do not fit into the category of otaku in the story. Their depiction of these characters reveal interesting limits of what is and what is not considered an otaku.

Academic literature in English also tends to presume otaku as male automatically, often females are reserved a chapter of their own in books on otaku, which is then on the BL loving fujoshi (a good example is the book by Itō et. al, 2012), and while there is a certain historical context to otaku being male with the word being tied to lolicon (Galbraith et.al. 2015), beyond the stereotype of fujoshi, female geeks are seemingly nonexistent. One of the interviewees of Rosenberg's study on women

¹⁹ I must thank Jyrki Kasvi and Ismo Kiesiläinen for this point which they made in the Radio programme Perttu Häkkinen on Yle Puhe. In the programme they told of a similar antisocial mislabeling in contrast to a sociable mainstream has affected Finnish nerds, too. (Häkkinen 2016)

in Japan describes herself as 'a bit of a geek' referring to her liking of games and computers, but as no Japanese version is available the exact name the woman gives herself is left unclear. She has also remained single, finding solitary existence preferable, and at the time of the study was 40-years old (Rosenberg 2013, 29-34), emphasizing the image single-oriented mindset of Japanese geeks further.

2.3.2. Fujoshi 腐女子

Fujoshi is a much more recently emerged term compared to otaku. It came to be in the early 2000's a self-deploring name for fans of female-oriented homoerotica known as BL (short for boys' love), shōnen ai or *yaoi*²⁰, even if the practice of reading and creating these kinds of stories is far older. Fujoshi can be seen a female counterpart to male otaku, especially in the context and in contrast to the fans of lolicon (Welker and McLelland in McLelland et.al 2015, 12-13). Nowadays, fujoshi is often seen as a subtype of otaku (Thiam in Galbraith et.al. 2015, 179 and 182 Hester in McLelland et.al 2015 173), and according to Hester many fujoshi self-identify more readily as otaku instead of fujoshi. While according to other studies many fujoshi keep their interests hidden due to not wanting to be labelled as otaku i.e. socially inept (Kaneda quoted in Ingulsrud and Allen 2010, 58). Thus, the category of fujoshi is also very complicated and its usage by no means straightforward. In my study I will focus on different types of self-identified fujoshi, who I will examine in detail.

The name itself is a wordplay of a word meaning a lady or a woman (婦女子), but with the first kanji (pronounced fu) switched to a homonym meaning something rotten or rotting (腐女子). Fujoshi are clearly gendered from the name onwards: the joshi part of the term remains unchanged and means a girl or a woman. There are also several derivations of the term fujoshi, for example *kifujin* (貴腐人), denoting an adult woman who likes BL etc. and *shufu* (主腐), denoting a housewife fan of BL etc.. Both terms switch a fu-pronounced kanji with that of the rotten 腐 one, turning the words " lady" and " housewife" into their rotten counterparts (Kamm 2012). Therefore, they are known often in English as rotten girls/women, and many western consumers of this entertainment readily use the term for self-identification, too.

²⁰ Each of these names refers to a slightly different genre of female oriented homoerotica, with a lot of overlapping usage. Yaoi is a term used mostly in the context of homoerotic dōjinshi and it refers to their lack of plot developments, as most dōjinshi focus on either pornography or short mood pieces. For more on the differences between the genres see Yukari in McLelland et.al 2015. For the purpose of this study I will use the term BL to refer to commercially published female oriented homoerotica, both real and the fictional ones within the manga, and yaoi for dōjinshi and other fan works.

The term, fujoshi, while most often relating to the women consuming BL, it is sometimes also used as a general term for all female otaku, even if some fujoshi choose to rather identify as otaku not fujoshi, making the categorisation of these different identities very difficult indeed. A fujoshi can also be interested in voice actors or cosplay²¹ etc., but even then these people usually inhabit spaces closely related to the BL type of entertainment (Okabe and Ishida in Itō et.al 2012, 208-209, Galbraith 2011a and Meyer in Levi et.al. 2010, 234-235).

The societal discourse surrounding fujoshi in recent years has not been only negative, and they have gotten the label of “normal” women with overactive imaginations in media according to Galbraith (2011a, 219), but other sources reveal that fujoshi are at the same time labelled as the lowest, most hated strata of Japanese nerds (Okabe and Ishida in Itō et.al 2012, 215-221).

Notably, most fujoshi can be said to be “in the closet”: they do not reveal their true identities to people outside their fujoshi circles, living their lives as office ladies, university students or housewives. Unlike with stereotype of otaku, their fujoshiness cannot be spied from their outward demeanour (Okabe and Ishida in Itō et.al 2012, 212-214). The reason for this secrecy is that fujoshi are often perceived and perceive themselves to be deviants of what is expected of a lady in Japanese society as they consume and produce homoerotic pornography. As stated before, interest in sexuality outside of reproduction has been viewed as something unfit for a proper woman in contemporary Japan (Ryang 2006, 90-94, Shigematsu 2015, 174-177 McLelland in Johnson-Woods 2010, 78), which is made even worse by the “outlandishness” of these females’ focus non-hetero pornography and love stories. In a sense one could say that as nerds or geeks they embody a rejection of heteronormative standards and expectations of women, but do so much less violently as their male-otaku counterparts who often reject mainstream society openly starting from their outward appearance.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s there was a fujoshi boom, with manga, novel and even movie representations of fujoshi. Notably, the point of view of majority of these mass-media products was male, the fujoshi were studied from the outside and their weird ways presented for the reader to gape at. Most famous manga examples are *Tonari no 801-chan* (by Kojima Ajiko, 2006-, My Neighbour 801-chan in English), *Fujoshi Kanojo* (by Shinba Rize and Pentabu, 2008-2010, translated

²¹ Cosplay is short for costume play. Cosplay means the hobby of dressing up as one’s favorite anime, manga, game etc. character.

to English as *My Girlfriend is a Geek*) and *Mōsō shōjo otaku-kei* (by Konjō Natsumi 2006-2010, translated to English as *Fujoshi Rumi*), with two first mentioned being manga adaptations of blogs and novels written by men. In these representations, too, the fujoshi is outwardly a normal looking cute girl or a woman, who leads a monstrous double life²². These early representations of fujoshi have received some critical attention (Galbraith 2011a and Hester in McLelland et.al. 2015), but my interest lies in the portrayal of fujoshi in stories where the point of view is also female, as is usually the creator, too.

2.3.3. Fudanshi 腐男子

Last comes the fudanshi, which is the most recent of these names for Japanese geeks. It is a further wordplay of the name fujoshi, taking the male equivalent of joshi *danshi* and adding the rotten fu-prefix to the word: 腐男子. According to Nagaike in the book *Boys Love Manga* (McLelland et.al. 2015) the term emerged around the year 2002 in web forums. Fudanshi is used to identify men who enjoy reading BL, which is sometimes viewed falsely as an entirely female world within manga. This has never been the case: an estimate of about 10% of the Japanese readers of BL were male in 2003 (Levi 2010, 3), 11% of BL readers in an English language survey stated their gender as male (Pagliasotti, 2008) and already in the 1978 the trailblazing magazine of female oriented homoerotica *June* had a male editor and quite a lot of male readers (Nagaike in McLelland et.al. 2015, 189). Fudanshi also emerged as a character in manga towards the end of 2000s, with one of the earlier examples being a minor fudanshi character in the manga *Fujoshi Kanojo* by Shinba Rize and Pentabu.

The sexual orientation of fudanshi seem to be varied, and certainly not all of them identify as gay. Rather, it seems a good portion of them identify as heterosexual according to an online survey conducted by Yoshimoto Taimatsu and quoted by Nagaike in McLelland et.al. 2015. Most of the respondents in the same survey identified as gay or bi preferring men though. On the other hand, many gay men in Japan do not enjoy reading BL, as the fierce criticism aimed towards BL and its readers for the stereotypified characterisation and the appropriation of gay culture shows (Lunsing 2006). Within fudanshi identification seems to lie the trap of erasure of gay identities, as it might be easier to identify as fudanshi in a heterosexist society where non-heterosexual orientations face discrimination (Nagaike in McLelland et.al 2015, 190-193).

²² Sometimes quite literally, like the green monster that emerges from the back of the fujoshi main character of *Tonari no 801-chan* (801 can also be pronounced as yaoi and is a “secret code” for the term) whenever she goes overboard with her fujoshi fantasies.

Yet the BL sphere seems to act as a safe haven in the narrow masculinist expectations of Japanese society for its fudanshi readers. In this it can provide a queer space within which the expected masculine performance forced upon men can be shed briefly and they can enjoy male vulnerability and passivity in a safe environment. In very much the same way many scholars have described the charm of BL for its female readers, who can identify with the aggressive, penetrating seme (or the penetrated uke), if they so wish (for example McLelland 2000a, 73-75 and Yukari in McLelland et.al. 2015, 88-89).

According to Taimatsu's survey, one of the distinctions between fujoshi and fudanshi seems to be the type of BL they enjoy. Fudanshi seem to prefer cutely drawn and not overtly sexual stories and dislike the otherwise very popular BL series that have a lot of hardcore pornography, with explicit depictions of anal and oral sex and often with themes of rape and sadomasochism. (Nagaike in McLelland et.al. 2015 194-195) In a similar vein, a male occasional reader of BL, (who did not explicitly identify as a fudanshi) interviewed by Björn-Ole Kamm (2012) was drawn to the cuteness of the characters (outward and psychological). I cannot help but to be reminded of the early stages of lolicon manga described by Galbraith in his 2011b article, these comics are also drawn in a cute style, and the erotized prepubescent girls are androgynous with their yet unformed female sexual organs. Adult male presence is erased from these comics, as they are not necessarily explicitly sexual in nature (McLelland 2001 and Galbraith, 2011b) and when they are the encounters happen with for example forest animals or between two loli girls²³. But critically examining such connections is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Thus far fudanshi have only limited critical attention within the Anglophone academia, Nagaike's chapter being one of the first published in English, and not much in Japanese academia either. The lives of fudanshi in contemporary Japan, and maybe even beyond, are yet an unknown country. Due to this lack, there is not much information available to help anchor the characterisation of the fudanshi encountered in the manga studied in this thesis to reality. Therefore, this study focuses not as much in any truthfulness of representation, but more on the way in which this new character type is constructed to the viewing pleasure of an assumed female audience and in which ways these men who disrupt gendered expectations come in conflict with the normative society.

²³ There are/were also comics depicting sex between a loli-girl and adult man, at least according to Schodt (1983, 136), but a thorough analysis of which is more prevalent is, again, beyond the scope of this thesis, and the access to these potentially illegal images and stories is also very limited.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Theories

Judith Butler's writings on the situatedness and performativity of gender together with the concept of the intelligibility of gender, forms the theoretical pillar of this thesis. For Butler, gender performativity is the repetitive acts that form and naturalise gender, hiding the performative origin of them (1999 [1990], 185) making genders seem as something natural: a biological reality. Gender precedes sex, as the repetition that turns into expectations turns into a perceived reality of sexual difference and "natural order of the world". Therefore, Butler is antiessentialist: rejecting the notion of a biological "truth" of sexes and genders. For Butler the reality built by these endless repetitions is a heteronormative world with binary opposite genders of man and woman, who must desire each other sexually (1999 [1990], 42).

As for intelligibility, Butler states in *Undoing Gender* that persons are regulated by gender, and that this regulation is a condition of the cultural intelligibility of the person. To veer away from the hetero norm by for example loving the same gender as one is perceived to be, is to turn oneself into an aberration (that might invoke the attention of regulatory powers such as medical or psychiatric instances). (2004, 52) The concept of deviation is not limited only to sexuality and love, for example misconduct in behaviour (e.g. a man disliking sports) or vocabulary (especially in Japanese where the way one speaks tells much of the speaker and of the situation) or even intersex babies where their bodies do not conform to the binary gender expectations, are all examples of deviating from gendered intelligibility.

It is worthy of note that the performativity of gender does not equal choice, reducing gender into a figurative set of clothes an individual can choose depending on their mood. The naturalised world of performed genders and the expectations of what is a gender are closely tied to intelligibility, as going against the grain can have serious repercussions to an individual. Furthermore, the state of naturalisation gender achieves through this repetition makes it hard, but not impossible, to spot the performative nature of gender. (Butler 1993, x)

Butler further elaborates her theory on performativity with the possibility of subversive repetition of the heteronormative matrix. This subversive repetition is what seeks to undermine the naturalised performances that seem to be naught but "naturally being" a gender or sex. Usually this also means ridiculing and parodying the target of subversion (Butler 1999 [1990], 187-189). Sharon

Kinsella writes in her book *Adult Manga* that the themes of yaoi, Boys' Love and lolicon that emerged from the *dōjinshi*-culture in the 1980s to the mainstream have been expressions of resistance to gender norms and societal expectations pushed on Japanese youth (2000, 123-124). This serves to show how much of the struggle of gender and growing up, shows up in comic culture in Japan, whereas in other countries such manifestations might be found elsewhere.

Some have seen further subversive potential in BL and the *fujoshi* consuming it (for example Bauer 2013, Nagaike 2011), others see it as naught but forcing heteronormative structures onto sexual minorities harming all involved (Williams in Levi et. al 2010. Ishida in McLelland et.al 2015 and Lunsing 2006). Brickell has criticised Butler's theory of subversive repetition as being under the major threat of just being interpreted as a part of the larger heteronormative framework (Brickell 2005, 35), this is what probably has lead different scholars in seeing both subversive potential and its exact opposite in BL. Hence, we see that subversion is a double edged blade, one that can just as well enforce that which it seeks to topple over.

The situatedness and performativity of gender are not a rare theoretical background when studying manga, for it has a long tradition of cross-dressing, gender-bending and same-sex desire. As does Japanese entertainment in general, for example traditional Japanese theatre Kabuki with its all-male actors (Leupp 1995, 90-92), and its contemporary equivalent Takarazuka, an all-female theatre troupe (Robertson 1998 and Powell 2005, 138-149 for both).

In her work *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler describes fantasy as a place and a state where bodies, genders and other things unreal in the rigid structures of heteronormative reality can be first imagined: a realm of possibility (not impossibility). There they can be explored and then brought to reality undermining the naturalised heteronormative gender structure of society (2004, 28-29). Manga has the potential to harness this power and at times manga has indeed emerged as an arena where mangakas (and the readers themselves in the form of *dōjinshi*, or fan parodies and amateur manga) have explored the possibilities of gender and sex. The *shōjo* manga revolution of the 1970s and the emergence of the *dōjinshi* subculture in the 1980s are prime examples of this. On the other hand manga has the ability to do just the opposite: to enforce the existing heteronormativity with formulaic stories and traditionalist gender representation (for example Matanle et.al. 2014, Shamoon 2012, 104).

Continuing on Butler's theory of performativity, Barbara Czarniawska states that this performativity is not limited to the body performing for itself, but gender can be done unto others too, via acts of subtle discrimination. This subtle discrimination can be hidden behind criteria e.g. "she lacks leadership skills" hiding the genderedness of the discrimination (2006, 234-235), there is indeed a double standard working against those perceived to be of a "wrong" gender or sexuality, as for example the behaviour that makes an assertive female to be seen as a difficult bitch is often viewed as positive in a male, or how a nurturing nature perceived as emasculating in a male.

Thus, the performativity theory is a complicated and a difficult terrain to navigate when using it to study gender, but nevertheless it is a fascinating one. Brickell ponders in his critique on Butler that this theory is more suited in studying narratives and texts than social theory (2005, 39) and Czarniawska also emphasizes that her theory is best suited in studying fiction where the chaos of everyday reality is distilled into a more linear narrative reality (2006, 249).

In light of these statements, I will use the theory of performativity and that of doing gender unto others just as that, a tool to analyse the types of genders and possible enforcing and resisting of gendered structures present in the manga this study analyses. These manga give an interesting glimpse to Japanese gendered expectations and roles: if one only becomes an adult after marriage and stays forever as a child if not, then biology on its own is not yet enough to turn one into a full grown man or a woman. In turn, the roles a biological body should perform after entering marriage are very strict and narrow. Indeed, being an otaku, freeter or a NEET can be viewed an act of resistance towards the gendered expectations of Japanese society, a refusal to "grow up" (Cook 2012, 58 and Eng in Itō et.al. 2012, 92). How the openly living otaku and the closeted fujoshi and fudanshi navigate the mainstream gendered expectations and romantic encounters with each other and outsiders, can similarly reveal something of the possible changes or stagnations of Japanese gendered structure of mainstream society.

3.2. Female-oriented manga and nerd identities

My topics, female oriented manga and gendered nerd identities of Japan, have received some critical attention in Anglophone academia over the years. Apart from a myriad of more general studies on manga (for example: Schodt 1983 and 1996, Gravett 2004, MacWilliams 2008, Ingulsrud & Allen 2010, Johnson-Woods 2010, Berndt & Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013 and few in Finnish too, Mäkinen 2007 and 2009), and a recent book focusing on the more problematic sides of manga

culture, like lolicon and pornography by McLelland 2016, three books have been published focusing on shōjo manga: Prough (2011) focuses on contemporary shōjo manga, Shamoons (2012) maps the development and history of it and an anthology of articles edited by Toku (2015) focuses on different aspects of shōjo manga. Adult women's manga has its own book by Itō (2010).

Both types of manga have of course been the topic of several academic articles with varying thematic foci over the years. These three books are the most thorough and general studies done on girls' and women's manga in English, however. Most notable articles for my thesis are the studies of fujoshi and gender in manga, one is an article written by Jeffrey T. Hester and it was published in McLelland et.al. 2015 and another by Galbraith 2011a. Others are a study of female representation in work environment in adult manga by Matanle et.al (2014) and studies of pornographic ladies' comics one of the first in English being Sandra Buckley (in Penley and Ross, 1991) and Anne Allison 1996, both with a very negative tone and with later additions by Shamoons (in Williams 2004) and Jones 2005 and King 2011 of a more positive perspective on them.

Boys' love and its variations have also received critical attention in the form three books in English: Levi et.al 2010, focusing on the international fandom of BL, Nagaïke 2011 focuses mostly on literature but does not omit manga and Mark McLelland et. al. 2015 focuses on Japan. All these books have also scrutinised fujoshi. The last book has so far the only English academic article focusing solely on the yet rather unknown fudanshi written by Nagaïke Kazumi, that I have been able to find. Fudanshi are mentioned often in newer literature on BL and other male-male erotica, though, so the phenomena is gradually becoming known also within the western academia. There are of course several articles on BL published, for example: McLelland 2000b, 2005, 2006, and some focusing on different aspects of BL: Welker (2006) focuses on shōnen ai as a place for lesbian women to express their sexuality, Pagliasotti (2009) has written on the problems of globalizing BL, Nagaïke (2009) examines the racial stereotypes in BL and Saito (2011) focuses on yaoi fan-parodies.

There is also a book on the global phenomena of female oriented male-male romance and pornography (of which BL and yaoi is but one current), by Bauer (2013). In her book Bauer criticizes academic writing on both western fans of slash (i.e. homoerotic fan parodies of popular culture characters) and fans of BL/yaoi/shōnen ai on pathologizing these people. The fact that some women act in such "irrational" way seems to bewilder many, and because of this, many articles on fujoshi focus on trying to explain the reason why women would do such a preposterous thing as to enjoy male-male pornography and love stories. While at the same time the similar tradition of men

enjoying “lesbian” pornography goes high unnoticed. This view is shared by Kamm (2013) and Wood (2013). A few examples of this hunt for rational reasons are Saitō’s article on otaku sexuality (2007), McLelland’s early thoughts on the BL phenomena from 2000a and 2000b (but he has later revised his views, see McLelland 2006). There has been an issue of the *Transformative Works and Cultures* that was dedicated to fans of boys’ love both within and outside of Japan in 2013. In Japanese the world of female oriented homoerotica has received much more attention starting from the 1990’s yaoi debate (which is chronicled in detail by Lunsing, 2006) and a myriad of books (one prominent example being Ishida 2008) and articles published both within and outside of the academia.

Male otaku have received a host of articles and two books worth of critical attention: Itō et.al, 2012, which also has a chapter on fujoshi, and Galbraith in 2015. A book by Kinsella (2000), also deals extensively on otaku identities and dōjinshi culture, both male and female. Notable academic articles written on otaku in English are: otaku sexuality by Galbraith (2015) and Kinsella’s 1998 article on dōjinshi subculture.

Fujoshi have also been the topic of several books in Japanese (for example Sugiura 2006), but not in the English speaking academia. Many academic articles on fujoshi outside of the aforementioned books have been published, for example Galbraith 2011a, Welker 2011 and Kamm 2013.

I wish to build onto this profound groundwork on nerd identities and on manga with combining the two and examining what kind of a place the most avid consumers of this media have within it. Also building on the heterosexual and boys’ love romance traditions of shōjo and josei manga I will examine the changes that have occurred in recent years. In this my main points of reference are the books by Prough (2011), Shamoon (2012) Itō (2010) and Ryang (2006) who examines the role of love in modern Japan and the article on fujoshi representation in manga by Hester (in McLelland et. al. 2015), on top of which I will of course compare the manga representations of the nerd depicted with accounts on their real life counterparts, to see if any disruptions emerge.

4. Methods and Data

4.1. Methods

I will critically read not only the textual but also the visual material presented in the manga, as both levels of communications carry information important to the understanding of the stories. The study of performativity in gender can easily be used for both, as it encompasses all forms of human

behaviour and mannerisms that build gendered identities. Manga is a prime source material in this approach as it often exaggerates expressions, mannerisms and human anatomy visually in its storytelling. Maybe even more importantly in manga, each facial expression, pose, body shape and word uttered is a result of a conscious decisions made by the mangaka, thus the performativity on each page is strengthened as nothing is left to chance. Nothing in these representations are accidents but deliberate choices. By comparing the differences and similarities between different nerd identity representations in each manga and the faiths that await them we will recognise the possible stereotypes and the possibility of stories breaking them.

I will divide my analysis into sections by gendered identity and nerd identity first, going over the different character types presented in each manga, and how their identities are built. Then I will focus on the plot elements and changes each character type faces within the story scouring them for similarities and differences, and their possible meanings in a greater context of Japanese society. With the case of fujoshi and to some extent otaku, it is also possible to compare changes in manga representation over the years as previous research exists.

4.2. Data

My data consists of contemporary, popular josei or shōjo manga that has otaku, fujoshi or fudanshi identified characters as main and minor characters. I enforce contemporary manga in order to catch the most recent possible changes in the depiction of nerd characters in manga, and popularity in order to ensure that these characters and their representation in the manga has resonated with a wide readership.

*Kuragehime*²⁴ (海月姫), or Princess Jellyfish in English, was written and drawn by Higashimura Akiko and was serialised in *Kōdansha Kiss*, a magazine aimed for female readers of 20-40 years of age (Tokiwa 2014). It ran from 2008 to 2017, and was collected into 17 tankōbons. *Kuragehime* has had an anime adaptation in 2011, a movie adaptation in 2015 and now with its ending a live action TV series was announced to start in 2018 (Fuji TV 2018).

²⁴ I will add an Appendix of manga, names, identities and pictures of all the main characters and a summary of their relationships to the end of this study to help readers not intimate with all the series and their characters to reference who is who. See Pictorial Appendix of the characters in the data



Figure 1 The cover of *Kuragehime* volume 1. Characters pictured from top to bottom and left to right: Banba, Jiji, Chieko, Mayaya, Kuranosuke and Tsukimi

Kuragehime is a story of a nerd girl, Kurashita Tsukimi²⁵, who has recently moved to Tōkyō to work as an illustrator. In reality she does not really work, but spends her days living in an all-female boarding house called Amamizukan, with five fellow otaku: Chieko²⁶ who is a doll-otaku and the daughter of the owner, Mayaya who is a tall and energetic Three Kingdoms otaku²⁷, Jiji a *kare sen*²⁸, Banba who is a train otaku and Mejiro-sensei who is a BL mangaka with a severe phobia of social situations. Tsukimi herself is a jellyfish otaku spending her days drawing pictures of different jellyfish. They call themselves *Amāzu*²⁹ or Amars i.e. Nuns or the Sisterhood to further emphasize one of the main precepts of their life in the Amamizukan: a life without any use for men. Chieko's mother, the owner of Amamizukan, is also an otaku-like fan of South Korean idols and spends most of the series in Korea stalking them with her two friends adding yet another

layer to the types of nerds in Japan. There is also a supporting nerd girl Nomu who is a friend of Chieko's and also a doll otaku.

Tsukimi's life turns upside down when she catches the attention of a crossdressing rich boy Koibuchi Kuranosuke. He is beautiful, princesslike and exotic due to his mother being a Caucasian woman (and he the offspring of tryst adopted into the 'main family' when he was about three or four years old³⁰). The pair ends up trying to start a brand of clothing in order to collect enough money to buy the whole Amamizukan in order to save it from being torn down as a part of reconstruction of the area. As the story progresses Tsukimi gets a suitor in the form of Kuranosuke's older half-brother

²⁵ Her first name Tsukimi (月海) is a pun of *kurage* (海月) i.e. jellyfish, with the kanji switched

²⁶ I will refer to characters in the manga mostly with their first names or nicknames, since they are most often used when referring to the characters within the stories.

²⁷ A historical period in China 220-280 C.E., which enjoys popularity among some Japanese fujoshi /otaku.

²⁸ 枯れ専 a girl, usually in her twenties, who is a fan of elegant old men

²⁹ 尼〜ず the first kanji being that of a nun

³⁰ Such adoptions are not unheard of in Japan, and Kuranosuke's adopted nature is not a source of much drama in his familial life, the drama springs from elsewhere. (see for example White 2002, 7, 40 and Lebra 2007, 313-314)

Shuu and another in Kai Fish a Singaporean CEO of an international clothing company, both of whom fit into the successful salaryman mold more or less.

The series is a romantic comedy with complicated and changing relationships between Tsukimi and outsiders of the Amamizukan while the other Amāzu stay away from the romantic mayhem most of the time.



Figure 2 The cover of *Watamote* volume 3. Characters pictured from left to right: Shinomiya, Mutsumi Asuma, Nishina, Serinuma, Igarashi and Nanashima.

Watashi ga motete dōsunda (私が、モテてどうすんだ), was written and drawn by Junko and it was serialised in the shōjo manga magazine *Bessatsu Friend* 2013-2018. The series has been translated to English with the name 'Kiss Him not Me!' but a more literal translation of the name would be along the lines 'What do I do, I became girlfriend-material'. The series ended in early 2018 and was collected into 14 tankōbon books. It got an anime adaptation in 2016. The name of the story is often shortened to *Watamote*, which I will also use to conserve space.

The story is of an overweight fujoshi Serinuma Kae who has absolutely no interest in heterosexual relationships, but loves anime, manga, BL and pairing both imagined and real men together in homosexual relationships. She has several good looking male friends at her high school: Igarashi and Nanashima who are her

classmates, a kindly *senpai*³¹ Mutsumi Asuma in the history club she attends and a beautiful but cold *kōhai*³² Shinomiya who is half Norwegian. She has semi-secretly paired Igarashi and Nanashima into a homosexual pairing with her fellow fujoshi classmate A-chan.

Serinuma's life takes a complete turn when a beloved anime character dies and due to grief she spends a week in her room without eating. She emerges from this mourning thin and beautiful. To

³¹先輩 a senior student, one's superior but who needs to look after the junior members of the group.

³²後輩 a younger student. The hierarchical relationships of seniors and juniors in schools and at workplaces are form an important structure to relationships in Japan

her horror, her male friends immediately start to court her, and soon a fifth female suitor Nishina joins the fray. Nishina is also a hardcore fujoshi, and very openly attracted to Serinuma.

As the story progresses Serinuma gets even more suitors in the form of Mutsumi Asuma's older brother Mutsumi Kazuma, who is a teacher trainee at Serinuma's school, and her childhood friend Mitsuboshi. None of these male suitors have even a slight otaku identity. Needless to say the series is a romantic comedy with a lot of plot twists.



Figure 3 The cover of Wotakoi volume 1. Characters pictured are Nifuji Hirotaka and Narumi, the main couple.

Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii (ヲタクに恋は難しい), is written and drawn by Fujita. It has been published online since 2015 first in Pixiv, then in Pixiv Komikku as a part of Ichijinsha's Comic Pool online magazine. The name translates to English as 'Love is difficult for otaku' and the Japanese name of the series is often shortened to *Wotakoi* which I will also use to save space.

Wotakoi has been collected into 4 tankōbon books, and the series has become quite the hit, and quickly at that. Wotakoi had two of its volumes on the ranking of top selling manga of 2017 their combined sales being over 1.2 million books (Anime News Network 2017b). Furthermore, an anime adaptation is planned for spring of 2018.

There are currently some chapters only available online in Pixiv Komikku as they have not yet been collected to tankōbon format. I will use both in my analysis and refer to the online chapters by their chapter numbers 18 to 24.

The story of Wotakoi is of a closeted fujoshi Office Lady Narumi who bumps into her childhood friend Nifuji Hirotaka, a gamer otaku, when starting at a new job. The pair starts dating and the story focuses much on the slow and often awkward progress of their relationship. Narumi and Hirotaka also have a developing friendship with their coworkers Koyanagi and Kabakura, who are also an otaku-fujoshi couple and have been dating each other since high school. Nifuji Naoya, Hirotaka's

non-otaku little brother, and his budding relationship with a female gamer otaku Sakuragi Kō is also a side plot in the manga.

The story is more in the vein of a slowly developing slice of life than a dramatic romance, much attention is given to the everyday happenings in the lives of the four adult otaku and fujoshi, both at the office and in their private sphere.



Figure 4 The cover of *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* volume 1. The character pictured is the main character Gucchi.

Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu (腐男子高校生活), is written and drawn by Michinoku Atami and it has been published online in Pixiv Komikku and *Zero-Sum Online* since 2015. The name translates to English as 'The high school life of a fudanshi'. So far it has been collected into 4 tankōbon books. The series got an anime adaptation in 2016.

The story is a slice of life comedy manga of a fudanshi high schooler Sakaguchi Ryō (Gucchi for short) and his friends: the non-otaku Nakamura, Shiratori who is a strongly stereotyped *okama*³³, Nishihara Rumi who is Gucchi's first fujoshi friend and her older sister Nishihara Yumi who is a cosplayer and a fujoshi, whose mother is also a fujoshi. Later Gucchi meets and befriends a fellow fudanshi Daigo.

The series is the least romantic of all of my data, but it offers a good contrast to the other series with fudanshi characters with its lack of same-sex romantic tensions. It is more in the vein of slice of life comedy, with much of the humour derived from the clash of mainstream normality and otaku weirdness, but with the main point of view staying with Gucchi.

³³お釜 Okama is a contested term under much debate, many find it to be a derogatory term, others not as much. It is most often used to refer to an effeminate homosexual man or a male-to-female crossdresser, which represents the most common stereotype of a homosexual in Japanese entertainment and mainstream thought (McLelland 2000a, Lunsing in McLelland and Dasgupta 2005). There is also a connotation of prostitution and being the receiving partner in anal sex linked to the term.



Figure 5 The cover of *Sasaki to Miyano* volume 2. The characters pictured are Sasaki and Miyano, the main pair of the series.

Sasaki to Miyano (佐々木と宮野), is written and drawn by Harusono Shō and it has been published online in Pixiv Komikku since 2016. So far 3 tankōbon books have been released. The series got its first Drama CD adaptation in early 2018. The series title can be translated into English as Sasaki and Miyano.

The story is of a closeted fudanshi high schooler Miyano who by chance meets Sasaki when he helps Miyano to put an end to a brawl in the school yard. Sasaki is Miyano's senpai who looks like a junior delinquent³⁴ with his ear piercings and dyed hair. The pair become friends, Sasaki slowly finding out about Miyano's BL hobbies, and that his feelings towards Miyano are more than just friendly.

The story is BL, even if it mainly focuses on a slice of life -type depiction of high school life in an all-boys school. There are two male supporting characters with fujoshi girlfriends, who are themselves never seen, but are the topic of conversation on several occasion. Sasaki's classmate Ogasawara is in a relationship crisis due to his girlfriend's fujoshihood, while Miyano's classmate Kuresawa fully accepts his girlfriend's fujoshihood. Miyano rather openly pairs his other senpai friend Hirano (who is also a friend of Sasaki's) with his dorm roommate Kagiura in a homoerotic pair, much to the chagrin to Hirano himself.

³⁴ He is classified as 不良, a bad boy, in the promotional character-type labelling of the manga, even if in practice he is not really a bad boy delinquent. These character typings are important in the promotion of BL manga as many readers have very particular tastes in the type of plot and seme-uke character types. Miyano is labelled simply as a fudanshi.

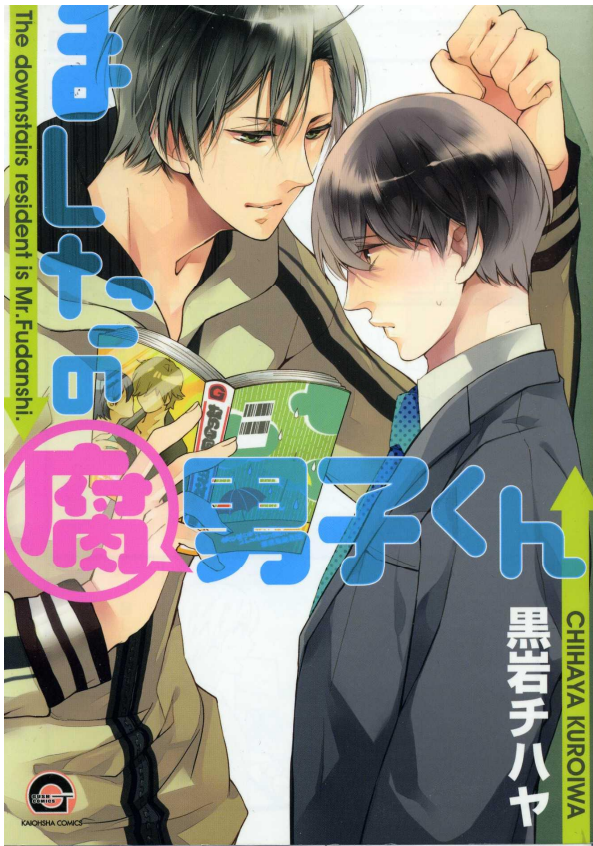


Figure 6 The cover of *Mashita no Fudanshi-kun* volume 1. Characters pictured are Motoi and Sokabe, the main pair of the series.

Mashita no Fudanshi-kun (ましたの腐男子くん), was written and drawn by Kuroiwa Chihaya and was serialised in the BL magazine *Gush* from 2014 to 2017. The story was collected into 3 tankōbon volumes. The name translates to English as “My downstairs neighbour is Mr. Fudanshi”.

The story is of a self-identified and closeted gay salaryman Sokabe who has a crush on his downstairs neighbour Motoi. Motoi turns out to be a fudanshi when Sokabe accidentally tumbles over a stack of BL manga in Motoi’s room. The chaotic situation ends up in Motoi thinking that Sokabe is a fellow fudanshi instead of a gay man and a precarious friendship begins. The friendship quickly turns into a romantic one where the boundaries of homosexuality and fudanshi tendencies is often tested.

Motoi has three fujoshi friends: Inushima, Tomonaga and Ichii, who are minor characters. Later he makes friends with a fellow fudanshi Furuichi who is a heterosexual with a girlfriend and past trauma of girlfriends dumping him due to him being a fudanshi. Lastly, a love rival in the form of Sokabe’s gay university friend Shijō also sets his sights on the fudanshi Motoi. The story is a romantic drama.

5. Analysis

I will divide the analysis into four different sections by gender and type of nerd, analysing and comparing the different representations of each manga separately first via this divide. In subchapters I will also focus on the borderline cases. After analysing the nerd representations independently, I will focus on the human relationships between the category at hand and people of other nerd categories and with non-nerd characters. There are several different kinds of friendships and romantic relations at the heart of all stories, and these relationships are often what challenge many of the nerd identities characters possess.

5.1. Non-fujoshi otaku women

Compared to her fujoshi sisters, otaku women without any inclinations towards male-male erotica are a minority in my data. While they form the majority of characters in Kuragehime, all other nerd women in the manga studied can be clearly defined as classic fujoshi apart from the minor character of Sakuragi Kō in Wotakoi.

5.1.1. The nuns of Kuragehime

In Kuragehime the supporting cast of Amāzu: Banba, Chieko, Jiji and Mayaya, would all already be proper adults, if they had performed their womanly duty of getting married and having children. Their exact ages are never revealed, but they are over thirty (Higashimura vol. 1, 112-113). They all could be classified somewhere in between NEET and a freeters, as all occasionally work as manga assistants for the resident BL mangaka Mejiro-sensei. On top of that Jiji and Chieko work from home: Chieko selling doll clothes she sews and Jiji sending out form letters. Banba and Mayaya apparently live on allowance sent by their relatives. The doll otaku Nomu, who does not live in Amamizukan and therefore is not a full-fledged member of the Amāzu, hovers on the edges of these identities: her exact age is never mentioned and she seems to be making a good living on selling doll clothes online. From a normative perspective this is not a real adult job compared to office ladies and salarymen, but a good enough source of income to allow for her to live on her own nonetheless. She too, is single, and strongly uninterested in forming relationships with other people outside of the doll otaku circles, romantic nor platonic, she consistently refers to humans as insects³⁵ and her stance towards humanity could be described as slightly misanthropic.

The main character Tsukimi is much younger, only 18. From a normative perspective she should be in a university or a vocational school, instead in the beginning of the story she claims to have come to Tōkyō to work as an illustrator but is never shown actually working. And indeed, Kuranosuke, the beautiful crossdressing male, categorises her too as a NEET rather quickly after their initial meeting (Higashimura vol. 1, 139). Tsukimi lives on an allowance her father sends every month from her far away hometown of Kagoshima in southern Japan. Her mother is dead. From a normative perspective, she is the only eligible single woman in the household, as the others are near passing or already past a proper marriageable age. This used to be the age of 25, but as the delaying of marriage has become more and more common, the deadline has shifted to 30 (Nakano in Kawano et.al. 2014, 169-170).

³⁵ 虫ケラ, mushikera

Curiously, Tsukimi self-identifies herself and the rest of the Amāzu, as fujoshi or *kusatta onna*³⁶. With the exception of Mejiro-sensei, she or her flatmates do not qualify as classical BL loving fujoshi. Outsiders, most often the Koibuchi brothers, usually refer to them as otaku, without any gender-specific suffix, when identifying them with subcultures. Therefore, the terms otaku and fujoshi are used interchangeably within the world of Kuragehime and the absence of BL elements in the interests of the otaku women is consistent (apart from the BL mangaka Mejiro-sensei, into whom I will delve more deeply in the fujoshi and fudanshi chapters). This is the only manga studied where the term fujoshi is used to refer to female otaku without any relationship to BL, yaoi or any other type of female oriented homo-erotica. The other Amāzu are not innocent of the ways of BL either, nor do they oppose such notions vocally, for example Mayaya happily places the serious-looking Koibuchi Shuu in the uke category when seeing him appear on television (Higashimura vol. 1, 95).

Another interesting feature of Tsukimi's otakuhood is the fact her nerdiness seems to spring from the trauma of losing her mother at a young age. As she has been unable to come to terms with her grief, she has turned to obsessing about jellyfish. She states often in times of extreme personal crisis that she would rather be a jellyfish than a human, or how she wishes to be reborn as one, forever floating in a borderless blue sea. She is unable to handle emotions, especially negative ones, and has fled from the world instead of facing them and growing as a person. She is depicted as immature in this sense, but without negativity or vilification, instead the reader is invited to sympathise with Tsukimi and to hope she will be able to grow out of her stagnated self. In this sense, the fact she is an otaku is shown as a lack and as something one needs to grow out of in order to grow as a person.

The past of the other Amāzu is not delved into to the same extent, but in a flashback Mayaya's original corruptor is revealed to be her older cousin. Mayaya is shown fighting time and again with her crying mother as she lives her life as a futureless NEET without any prospects of marrying anyone. Finally, Mayaya leaves and finds refuge in Amamizukan.

In a subsequent flashback, JiJi, already an admirer of elderly gentlemen, is shown being bullied by her little brother before moving to the boarding house, but neither seem to have a singular reason to why they strayed from the normative path in their youth. (Higashimura vol. 15, 127-139). The pasts of Banba and Chieko are not discussed in detail.

³⁶腐った女 this means a woman who has rotted, using two of the same kanji as fujoshi

Apart from the doll otaku, Chieko and Nomu, all of the Amāzu embody the negative stereotypical physical demeanour of otaku rather well: they do not use any makeup nor do their hair, spend as little money on clothes as possible while also preferring comfortable clothing instead of fashionable and effeminate clothes. All in all they spend as little energy on their outward appearance as humanly possible, rendering them unfeminine in the eyes of outsiders. As Laura Miller pointed out in her book on Japanese beauty industry, in Japan, and other post-industrial capitalist societies, beauty is achieved through consumption: it is a personal project one has to spend time and money on. In this view the lack of beauty then becomes a personal flaw, a sign of a bad, failed person, and a breach in social etiquette. (Miller 2006, 97-102) These women have opted out of this consumerist endeavour and at the same time opted out of whole society, and intelligibility as females. Shuu, the older brother of Kuranosuke, goes as far as to call them *yōkai*, meaning monsters or ghosts, rendering the Amāzu completely inhuman in his eyes (Higashimura vol. 2, 48), adding that their house should be demolished as quickly as possible. In his eyes, these sort of non-people have no right to live, at least this close to his own home and in conflict with the renewal plans for the area.

The doll otaku Chieko, on the other hand, always dresses in a kimono and has a more neat outward appearance compared to her flatmates. Despite this difference in demeanour, she is as uninterested in mainstream life as her sisterhood. She is also visibly overweight rendering her less attractive in the current heteronormative matrix which values thinness and youth in both women and men, but particularly in women. (Miller 2006, 46) Overweight characters are also rather rare encounters in manga, especially as characters who are not meant to be laughing stocks, or otherwise villainous or antagonistic (see for example Himes and Thompson 2007 views on obesity in western popular culture, which resembles Japan's situation, and Manzenreiter 2012 for Japanese governmental stance on obesity). Despite her unruly body Chieko gets a suitor in the end. More on her romantic affiliations in the fudanshi chapter.



Figure 7 Kuranosuke, Tsukimi and Chieko meet Nomu, the doll otaku. Kuragehime volume 6 page 46.

Chieko's friend Nomu, on the other hand, embodies a more normatively feminine mode of being, she is thin, her clothes have frills and she also does her hair. She cannot be described as normatively pretty though, as the figure 7³⁷ shows. Kuranosuke's horrified reaction to seeing her for the first time embodies clearly the stance of the normative mainstream towards creatures like Nomu. Her normative features are not a symptom of a desire to seem attractive to others, but a side effect of her interest in sewing beautiful clothes to her dolls which, like with Chieko, extends to her own

³⁷ Japanese comics are read from right to left and top to bottom.

clothing too. The dolls, which we see in abundance on the background, do embody a heightened version of the current normative beauty ideal in Japan: thin, slender, big eyes, small mouth with impeccable clothing and hair. She lives normative fantasies through her dolls, she is sewing a wedding dress for one of her dolls in this introductory scene (Higashimura vol. 6, 46-49). Chieko's relationship with her traditional Japanese dolls is just as close, and both see themselves as the mother of their swarm of doll-children. In effect they have outsourced the normative feminine lives to their dolls, thus leaving it only at the level of fantasy without needing to actually, bodily, participate in the heteronormative project of Japanese society with marriage and children. These two hover closer to the mainstream than the rest, but, as Kuranosuke's spontaneous reaction to Nomu shows, are rejected from the mainstream as weirdoes and creeps just as violently as the others.

Apart from the doll-otaku, the unfemininity of the Amāzu is also further emphasized with their rather unfeminine behaviour within and outside of their boarding house. Mayaya especially is loud, flamboyant in her movements at times invoking more stereotypically masculine taking of space with her long limbs. The discrepancy between her physical behaviour and normative passive femininity is clearly brought to light when she is forced to act as a runway model and has now qualms about crawling around on all fours (vol. 12, 46-49) or diving headfirst after capsule toy balls in her fancy dress (vol.6, 135-136). Nor do her speech patterns and mannerisms change with her bodily transformations.

Other Amāzu are less violently in conflict with behavioural femininity, but the train otaku Banba switches between a colloquial male coded I-pronouns³⁸ *ore*³⁹ and *washi*⁴⁰, which is a I-pronoun stereotypically used by elderly men, in her speech. Mayaya also tends to use *washi* in her speech, sometimes switching to *ore* or even *ore-sama*⁴¹, which is an extremely pompous and masculine way to refer to oneself. Her vocabulary is full historical speech patterns and words, too. No bewildered

³⁸ In Japanese it is rather common to switch between pronouns depending on the situation, making this fluctuation in no way uncommon, what is uncommon are the pronouns used. Those perceived female are often expected to refer to themselves with the pronoun *watashi*, which is actually a gender neutral pronoun often used by males too, especially in formal situations. A pointedly feminine I-pronoun is *atashi* but it is not in wide use, and is often used by effeminate okama-type characters like Shiratori in *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu*.

³⁹ 俺 <https://www.japandict.com/%E4%BF%BA> (Accessed 22.3.2018)

⁴⁰ わし <https://www.japandict.com/%E5%84%82> (Accessed 22.3.2018)

⁴¹ 俺様 <https://www.japandict.com/%E4%BF%BA%E6%A7%98> (Accessed 22.3.2018)

remarks are made in regards to these subversive uses for masculine pronouns during the manga. Rather, this behaviour only adds to the unintelligibility of these outcasts.

On the opposite end of this discrepancy with normative feminine ideals is JiJi, the admirer of elderly men, has so little presence others oftentimes forget she is even present. She often hovers like a thin ghost in the background of action packed situations.

The natural unattractiveness of the Amāzu is further emphasized by the eyes of the supporting Amāzu: JiJi, Mayaya and Banba, are rarely shown, if at all. In shōjo manga especially, but also in josei manga, the eyes of the character are of superior importance. The oversized eyes act as literal mirrors to the soul, reflecting the dreams and inner workings of the characters to the reader in form of sparks and stars. The mangaka of *Kuragehime*, Higashimura Akiko, is well versed in this manga particularity and often uses the dreamy, sparkly eyes for humorous effect, especially on the male cast of *Kuragehime*. The huge eyes have also traditionally emphasized femininity and attractiveness of a shōjo heroine. (Itō 2010, 67) The lack of eye contact with the supporting Amāzu also renders them more distant and less identifiable as characters, even less human. Figure 8 depicts all of the Amāzu.

The Amāzu have rejected mainstream society completely, living in isolation in their boarding house, venturing out only when necessary. Within its boundaries they lead a happy and fulfilling life together. Internal conflicts are absent from this world, which is united against their common enemies of mainstream folk and their nemesis, the dreaded “stylish people” known as *oshare*⁴². This group was labelled as the antithesis of the despised otaku subculture already in the 1980s (Takahara quoted in Yamanaka in Galbraith et.al 2015, 38-39). The Amāzu fear and loathe the *oshare* so much they literally turn to stone whenever in the presence of such a person. The cross-dressed beauty Kuranosuke often causes this effect on them, similarly males of all kinds are terrifying enough for the Amāzu to cause petrification. As the story progresses the Amāzu gradually get used to different people and situations they would have balked from before, while psychologically maintaining their outsider position nonetheless.

This haven of outcasts is anything but genderless, though. Starting from the way the residents identify themselves as nuns, which is reflected in the name they have given to their sisterhood, the Amāzu. Their boarding house is strictly female only, akin to a nun monastery, as an early encounter

⁴²おしゃれ Literally, stylish and fashionable, can be used as an adjective but also as a name for a type of person.

with a male gay couple asking to be allowed to live in Amamizukan proves. The Amāzu immediately refuse them and in annoyance they complain that gay men think all nerd women are fans of them and would love nothing more than to hang around gay guys, which is indeed an interesting remark in the context of invisible non-fujoshi otaku women seem to be in the other series. The golden rule they live by, cemented by their leader in absentia the BL mangaka Mejiro-sensei, whose messages are treated as heavenly decrees by the residents, is a life without the use for men. (Higashimura vol. 1, 64-65)

5.1.2. Genders and love in Kuragehime

The blissful, homosocial and asexual life in the Amamizukan gets permanently ruptured by two events in the beginning of the story. First Tsukimi gets saved by Koibuchi Kuranosuke, a rich boy who rebels against his politically powerful family by crossdressing. Tsukimi thinks for a short while Kuranosuke is biologically female, but his crossdressing is soon revealed. She labels him first as an *okama*, i.e. a crossdressing homosexual. Kuranosuke refuses this labelling insisting he is perfectly normal and only cross-dresses as a hobby. He manages to worm his way into the house by passing for a woman and bribing the other residents with expensive meat. The second calamity is the reality that the Amamizukan is scheduled to be demolished as a part of a big construction project. The only thing standing in the way of this utter annihilation is the fact that Chieko's mother, the owner of the house, spends majority of her time in South Korea stalking idols, making the process of her selling the house to realtors difficult. Kuranosuke decides to help the otaku women in saving their home and way of life from destruction. His strategy for winning over the house involves turning the outsider-Amāzu into intelligible women with makeup and fashionable clothes. His reasoning is that normative people will disregard these social outcasts, who fail to adhere to the beauty etiquette, also described by Miller (2006, 11). In effect, the Amāzu must adhere to the heteronormative matrix or be rejected and ignored by the ones in power. Kuranosuke even calls this transformative process donning armour, and it entails also wearing high heeled shoes, the pain of wearing which Kuranosuke asserts is a part of the armour of womanhood (Higashimura vol. 2, 90 and 103-104).



Figure 8 The Amāzu before and after Kuranosuke's transformation, the characters on the top panel from left to right are: Jiji, Mayaya, Chieko, Banba and Tsukimi. Kuragehime volume 2 page 104.

In a rather concrete example of doing gender unto others, Kuranosuke forces the social rejects into the mold of women, but only physically, with makeup, designer clothes, fancy hairdos and wigs, the change is depicted in figure 8. The only one who escapes this change is Chieko, who Kuranosuke sees as being quite feminine enough in her kimono, evoking the feel of a wealthy socialite when in presence of the Amāzu disguised as oshare. The gestures and mannerisms of the otaku women do not change with their clothing, but they outward appearance is enough for them to pass. None of the Amāzu do this voluntarily, instead they violently resist this gender play instilled on them by

Kuranosuke. This transformation goes against the grain of Butler's thought on how one cannot go to the wardrobe and choose which gender to wear today (1993, x) but as the Amāzu presented as biological women, the slip into a mainstream role is presented less challenging as if they are returning to the feminine "rightful place" from a position in conflict with it. At the same time Kuranosuke's high constant passing for a woman reminds us all, that biological sex is not a prerequisite for femininity. In fact, this entire process of transformations reveals much of how constructed femininity actually is.

The crossdressing of Kuranosuke or the Amāzu seeks not to attack the framework of gender structure of intelligibility in the story, or question the real life equivalent in any way. In fact the Amāzu are made to fit into the framework via dressing them up as normative women, flipping the Butlerian subversive repetition around completely into what Brickell feared in his critique of Butler's theory: the cross-dressed Amāzu only enforce the gendered structure rather than parody it. When they rejected it completely they were almost unable to venture out of their safe space, but with Kuranosuke's coercive actions they are made to fit in against their will and thrown out into the world.

Kuranosuke on the other hand does not face any dire consequences for his crossdressing either, nor is the reality of gender brought to question by his actions. He outrages no one but his father and older brother by his behaviour. When his crossdressing becomes public it is embraced rather than rejected, especially by middle aged women who are depicted as going crazy over crossdressing pretty boys (Higashimura vol. 7, 22-34). His normatively beautiful body, as both a man and a woman, seems to give him a free pass. When cross-dressed he performs the role of an intelligible female so well his performance neatly slips into the framework instead of subverting it. He does not wish to become a biological woman either, even if he sometimes states that real women are the only ones who can be princesses, but he seems to attain a level of princesshood suitable for himself. He also frequently almost reveals his maleness to the Amāzu by accidentally using the masculine I-pronoun *ore* instead of more neutral or feminine pronouns. This shows how Kuranosuke does not in his mind enter a feminine mode when dressing up as a woman, but retains his masculine personality. Effeminate homosexual stereotype of the *okama* is also tied to the usage of exaggeratedly feminine speech, thus further divorcing Kuranosuke of an *okama* identity, or even a parody of it.

This all being said, Kuranosuke being a crossdressing man, with a heterosexual orientation, does subvert the stereotypified idea of crossdressing men as only ever being effeminate gays in the vein of the *okama* stereotype. Kuranosuke stands testament to the fact heterosexual masculinity is not

the binary opposite and antagonistic of femininity nor does dressing up as a woman elementally threaten his masculinity or heterosexual prowess. Even if this assertion diverts from the Butlerian stereotype of subversive performance Kuranosuke's heterosexual orientation paired with his non-gender or -sexuality driven crossdressing challenge the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity within mainstream heteronormativity.

The gender transformation of the Amāzu is further emphasized when Kuranosuke's serious salaryman-like older brother, Shuu, bumps into Tsukimi in her womanly disguise and instantly falls in love with the mysterious beauty. A similar fate awaits Mayaya, the tall and thin Three Kingdoms fan, as she is forced to act as a model for Tsukimi and Kuranosuke's clothing brand and gets hit on by the Koibuchi's womanizing car driver Hanamori, much to her horror. (Higashimura vol. 6, 154-155). These men fall for the outward appearance only, not understanding the person within at all, rendering their feelings shallow and untrue. Kuranosuke on the other hand finds himself attracted to Tsukimi, even when she is not in her feminine disguise. This abhors the successful oshare man quite profoundly, at least in the beginning. Slowly he comes to terms with his feelings, deciding to not let Shuu have Tsukimi for himself as Shuu's love is not as true as his.

Same cannot be said of the other love rival of Kuranosuke's, the Singaporean CEO Kai Fish who instantly recognises Tsukimi despite her transformations, but wishes to use her as a tool to ensure the success of his clothing brand. That being said, his feelings towards Tsukimi are definitely more than platonic and more than exploitative, he treats her with kindness he does not have towards his other subordinates or lovers. His interest in Tsukimi does not neatly fall into either the superficial nor the pure love category, which goes deeper than just looks, and his character remains ambivalent. But the way he disregards his beautiful model lover and childhood friend in favor of Tsukimi hints at the deepness of his feelings. The virginal innocence of Tsukimi seems to hold a strong sway over both Kai Fish and Kuranosuke, the two immensely successful and goodlooking heterosexual men (Higashimura vol. 15). Kai Fish does not stop pursuing Tsukimi either, even after Tsukimi returns to Japan from Singapore with Kuranosuke and he loses his position as the CEO of his clothing company. He should no longer have any use for Tsukimi, but he follows her back to Japan anyway (Higashimura vol. 17, 110-111 and 128).

In the end Tsukimi does not form a heterosexual marriage with Kuranosuke for a classic happily ever after. Kuranosuke does confess his romantic feelings for Tsukimi, who welcomes him to live within the Amamizukan, where the restriction of males entering has been revoked. The exact fate

of their relationship is left open. Even at the end of the series neither of the other suitors, Kai Fish or Kuranosuke's older brother Shuu, drop their chase, but decide to keep on pursuing her. Nor are any of the Amāzu miraculously cured of their otaku nature with embracing normative femininity, mainstream heterosexuality and all of their performances. They have attained a level where they have become able to function in the outside society to the extent that they are no longer prisoners of their own fort, but in doing so they do not need to abandon their identity.

The narrative voice of Kuragehime, Clara the spotted jellyfish Kuranosuke helps save in the beginning of the story, goes as far as to tease the reader's expectation of Tsukimi and Kuranosuke getting married, telling straight to the reader that it is the 21st century: as long as there is love, it should be enough. In the context of the highly marriage orientated Japanese society, where even common-law marriages are rare, this statement is indeed symptomatic of the societal changes happening in Japan. It is a straight call to the reader to reflect upon one's own expectations of (heteronormative) romantic stories and the necessity of a rigorous societal structure of heteronuclear married families in contemporary Japan. (Higashimura vol. 17, 152-154)

Just as empowering is the message of the otaku women gaining the confidence to venture out into to the world, even if this is narrated through also the idea of turning beautiful in the process, but without having to "cure" oneself of the unwanted otaku behaviour. Nor does the beauty the mangaka of Kuragehime, Higashimura Akiko, advocates entail the consumerist hurdle post-capitalist beautification tends to be, but a more natural sense of it. See figure 9 for the beauty the Amāzu attain at the end of the story, finally showing their eyes, compared to the constructed beauty by Kuranosuke shown in figure 8.

Higashimura identifies herself as an otaku, and furthermore she is a divorced mother of one son. During the making of Kuragehime she got married to a new partner. All these details she shares with the reader in bonus manga at the end of each tankōbon book, thus making her own life also a part of the narrative world of Kuragehime. All in all, her story and her own personal life reflects well the current state of Japanese society, where the former hegemonic ideal of a heteronuclear salaryman/housewife family is no longer the only option worth pursuing much less the only conceivable option.



Figure 9 The Amāzu's natural beauty. Characters on the top panel: Nomu, Banba, Chieko and Jiji. Kuragehime volume 17 page 127.

5.1.3. Gamer otaku girl

The only other non-fujoshi female otaku is Sakuragi Kō from *Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii* (Wotakoi). She is a severely shy university student whose dress and demeanour appears so unfeminine she is first presented as male to the reader and also to Nifuji Naoya (the little brother of one of the main characters, Hirotaka) who tries to befriend her (Fujita vol. 3, 88-90).



Figure 10 Naoya and Kō meet for the first time. Wotakoi volume 3 pages 88-89

She is definitely not assertively masculine either, but she is tall, has short hair and dresses in clothes that are coded more masculine than feminine: straight slacks, button up shirts and hoodies, see figure 10. Her demeanour is not unkempt in the stereotypical otaku style even if it is unfeminine. Her name is gender neutral, which is not uncommon in Japan, and she uses the standard gender-neutral I-pronoun *watashi* when referring to herself.

Kō is a hardcore gamer otaku, who usually plays alone, but it is stated in her character profile that she would like to make friends but has been unable to due to her fear of social situations (Fujita vol. 4, 64). Unlike the Amāzu, Kō has not turned her back on society: she studies at the same university as Naoya, even if her shyness makes it challenging for her. She also expresses no dislike of men, nor women at that. Her relations to her parents is also not strained even if it is are distant. She still lives with her parents is usual for university students in Japan. It is revealed she used to play games with her father a lot when she was younger, but has since stopped (Fujita chapter 23, 1-3). The distancing

of the parent-child relationship is shown as sad, but without any outright conflict like in the case of Mayaya who was practically thrown out of her home by her mother.

There is no pressure for Kō to normalise herself from her parents nor from Naoya who wants to be her friend (though there is a shadow of possible romance looming over the budding relationship), in fact the completely non-otaku Naoya tries to learn how to play himself in order to spend time with Kō. Naoya's other male friends also openly embrace Kō as a part of their group and take her to a gaming hall to play with them (Wotakoi vol. 4, 100-110). No mention is made of her unfeminine appearance apart from the crisis she gets when her sex is revealed to the unsuspecting Naoya (the other friends knew of her biological sex). She feels that she has been leading him astray and he will hate her for lying to him. She has been aware herself of how Naoya does not know her biological sex, making her feeling of betrayal all the more grave. Naoya on the other hand is anything but angry with Kō after the revelation, he just feels stupid for not realising Kō's gender himself and is extremely distraught at the thought of having involuntarily hurt her feelings by misgendering her (Fujita chapter 22, 3-5). After they sort the misunderstanding out the friendship continues to develop, to the surprise of Kō, who was sure Naoya would no longer want to hang out with her after he found out she had been leading him into believing she is a man.

5.1.4. Comparing Wotakoi and Kuragehime

The biggest difference between Kō and the Amāzu of Kuragehime is of course age and education. As a university student Kō is still safe from the expectations pushed onto adult members of society, she is not yet expected to find a job, conform to job culture, find a man and marry him before turning 30. Nothing in Kuragehime points to the direction that any of the Amāzu have attended a university, and as mentioned before, all but Tsukimi are around 30 years old, i.e. "should have married already".

Another difference is how Kō's otakuness is not shown as a weakness or the result of a trauma as it is in Tsukimi's case. In fact, the mention of her liking playing games with her father when she was little is the only reference made as to why she became a gamer otaku (Fujita chapter 23, 2-4). Rather the fact that she is a gamer otaku and a biological female never rises up as a topic worthy of close scrutiny. She is horribly shy, yes, but not antisocial, and her shyness is not depicted as being the result of her otakuness, nor is there any mention of ostracism due to her otaku nature in the university or before. As Wotakoi is yet unfinished it is of course possible and even likely that Kō's childhood will be revealed in more detail later on, especially if her and Naoya's relationship starts

to turn into a romantic one. But the tone of Wotakoi's tone differs from Kuragehime substantially, as the entire premise of the series is to depict the lives of adult working men and women who are otaku and fujoshi while being a part of the mainstream society, too. Naoya and Kō are pre-shakaijin, not yet proper adults, so the conflict with mainstream society is even less glaring with her even if it is indeed there.

Kō has no ingrained hatred towards men or heterosexual relationships either. She is very nervous to be invited into Naoya's all male group of friends, because she feels talking to men is even more difficult than trying to talk to other women. This feeling is anything but hostile towards the men, however (Fujita vol. 4, 100). In this she is unlike the Amāzu who have turned their backs to society and on men especially.

Apart from these differences the way in which both manga depict female otaku identities is similar: even if Kō and the Amāzu are in no way perfect human beings, and refuse to perform the expected feminine role, the fact that they are otaku does not make them into failed human beings who are in need of reprogramming in order to fit in to mainstream society inside and out. Both manga take a rather sympathetic stance towards these characters, and thus, towards female otakuness. None of them are expected to shed their otaku identities completely in order to be seen fit in the eyes of society, even if some changes do occur which make them more able to function within it: the accumulating bravery of the Amāzu and the friendship of Naoya gives Kō happiness and courage to venture out into social situations.

The Amāzu are not expected to form a romantic heterosexual relationship to qualify as a happy ending either. While their conflict with mainstream society is not entirely erased the ending of Kuragehime leaves much room for dissident identities to exist. Whether or not such a fate awaits Kō is yet unsolved, but the heterosexual pairs otherwise central to the story of Wotakoi give an inclination of how romantic love might hold the highest value within its world. But that being said, Kō finding heterosexual love as she is, without the need to conform to the beauty and behavioural norms of mainstream heteronormativity cannot be seen as a negative development, even if the Butlerian theory springs from sexual minorities. The diversification within the categories of acceptable heterosexual men and women is important in the same sense as sexual minorities need acceptance as they are. More on the other heterosexual couples of Wotakoi in chapters on working fujoshi and otaku.

5.2. Fujoshi

The number of otaku women may be low in the data, but the amount of fujoshi certainly makes up for it. There are fujoshi in all of the manga apart from Kuragehime, therefore I will break this chapter into subchapters according to age. I will begin with high school age fujoshi, continuing to office ladies and finishing with undisclosed and other adults, as the social expectations of womanhood change with age and societal status.

As a general overview of the contrast between the otaku women described in last chapter, almost all of the fujoshi are in the closet living outwardly as women performing the expected normative femininity. They are also depicted as beautiful and stylish. All except Serinuma Kae, the main character of Watamote, who is not herself clearly out of the closet either, but her overweightness and the caricaturised way in which she is drawn as unattractive sets her apart from the rest. Her personality on the other hand is shown as kind and considerate even before her transformation, which has enabled her to win over so many male friends. Another exception is Mejiro-sensei, the BL mangaka of Kuragehime, who turns out to be a man in the last chapter of Kuragehime, so more on him in the chapter on fudanshi.

5.2.1. High school life of fujoshi

Japanese high schools are famous for having tough curriculums and the lives of students full of stress due to the university exams looming just behind the corner. The failing or passing of the entrance exam often determine the course of one's career, as much more value tends to be placed on the university in which one has studied than the degree they have completed (Ingulsrud and Allen 2010, 154 and Yoneyama 1999).

The schools of the high school manga studied: *Watashi ga motete dōsunda* (Watamote), *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* and *Sasaki to Miyano*, seem to be an alternate universe compared to the conditions of actual high school life in Japan. The characters seem to have naught but leisure time to form relationships and engage in comedic shenanigans, even if the flow of the school years does form a temporal framework to the plotlines, and passing remarks to tests or entrance exams are made here and there. These schools seem to be an idealised world of either nostalgia or escapism, depending on the age of the reader. There are no drastic differences in the situations of the fujoshi in the first two manga mentioned and in the third there are none as the high school is an all boys' school. I will

delve into the absent fujoshi girlfriends in Sasaki to Miyano when I analyse the heterosexual romantic relationships between fujoshi and others.

The adult, reproductive and marital responsibilities are not yet forced upon girls of high school age either, so the lives of teenager otaku and fujoshi in real life and in the manga studied is not yet in such stark opposition with the gendered norms of Japanese society.

The main character of Watamote, Serinuma, begins the story as a kind and well liked overweight girl, who is mostly interested in obsessing over beautiful men having romantic and sexual liaisons with each other, with the aid of her fujoshi friend A-chan. A-chan has a relationship with a real boy, thus showing already at the beginning of the series a fujoshi can form a meaningful romantic relationship with another human. She is conventionally attractive, though, and she has not told this boyfriend of hers that she is a fujoshi. In her words, the relationship would be over if her true nature would be found out (Junko vol. 1, 55).

In contrast to her, Serinuma is very strongly against any need for a heterosexual relationship for herself, even if she has no need to violently banish men from her life, like the non-fujoshi otaku Amāzu do. She states multiple times during the course of the story that she only wants to watch two men get together, and has absolutely no need in participating herself in any kind of romantic or sexual activity. In fact, she thoroughly enjoys pairing her two friends, Igarashi and Nanashima, together into a homosexual relationship. In a similar vein, the main fujoshi of Wotakoi, Narumi and Koyanagi, pair their boyfriends in a homoerotic fantasy relationship. Both Serinuma and A-chan are in the closet with their interests in their school environment, forming a secret conclave of homoerotic interest.

In her original, fat form Serinuma does not fit the gender mold of a woman: she is unintelligible in the eyes of the male sex. Her unintelligibility does not invoke regulatory actions of the Butlerian kind, though. She is not hated and bullied for being fat, but remarks are occasionally made of her weight. For example, when Nanashima, her classmate, accidentally falls on top of her during gym class he suffers no injury and thanks Serinuma for acting as a bouncy meat cushion (Junko vol. 1, 14). There are also no remarks or attempts at getting her to lose weight in the beginning when her weight is perceived to be her natural state by those surrounding her. Figure 11 shows her transformation from a thin beauty back to her original form. Especially the change in her eyes is striking.



Figure 11 Serinuma transforming back to her fat form in Watamote volume 3 page 84

After Serinuma transforms to her beautified, thin version, she is immediately catapulted from a sexually unintelligible existence to the epitome of heterosexual feminine desirability. She gets four male suitors from her school on her first day in her new body: her classmates and the focus of her pairing: Igarashi and Nanashima, a formerly cold *kōhai* Shinomiya and her kind *senpai* Mutsumi, who actually is not yet courting her but gets caught in the developing courtship fray wishing to befriend all of the abovementioned.

Serinuma's behaviour, language, gesturing and clothing does not change, yet her changed body is enough to signal the emergence of a desirable woman to the boys surrounding her. While this could be seen as going against Butler's theory on performativity, one must keep in mind that the concept of performativity does not only entail the body acting and speaking in a certain way, the performativity and naturalisation of gender is far wider concept which also entails the accepted shapes bodies take (that in real life takes a lot of grooming to achieve, see Miller 2006), and in the fantastical context of Watamote Serinuma accidentally achieves these features without any effort of her own.

With the assistance of her heterosexually experienced friend A-chan he also begins to wear cute, feminine clothing and apply makeup rather quickly after her transformation. In this she is also a stark contrast to the Amāzu of Kuragehime, for she expresses no inherent antagonism towards mainstream femininity herself, nor does she feel any need to violently reject the eager males competing for her attention, even if she feels their attention to be thoroughly unwanted. A-chan advises Serinuma to keep her fujoshi side hidden from the suitors, when she ends up going on a group date with the lot of them. Serinuma is reluctant to go on the date and bewildered by the amount of interest she is suddenly given, but it does not cross her mind to act as a disgusting fujoshi to chase the suitors away. In her lack of resistance towards normativity or the suitors after her, she clearly represents a wish fulfilment fantasy aimed at the young readership, who can immerse themselves in a whimsical story where beauty is achieved effortlessly and a throng of beautiful boys vie for the heroine's heart; and all the while she gets to retain her rotten, fujoshi core.

She is forced to confess her fujoshihood on the date, though, unable to keep up the pretense of normative femininity. She uses the word otaku, not fujoshi, to the four boys, even though she self-identifies as a fujoshi on page 12 of Watamote volume 1. All but the innocent Mutsumi, are surprised and disgusted at her revelation, even if they remain silent. None of the four boys have even slight otaku tendencies. Only Mutsumi fails to understand the social horror that is the otaku and wishes Serinuma would not feel obliged to hide her hobbies from them. The other boys overcome their aversion for Serinuma's unsightly personality trait at the threat of Mutsumi stealing the beauty for himself. (Junko vol. 1, 50-80) After this Serinuma no longer tries to hide her true colours and the boys find themselves attending dōjinshi conventions (Junko vol. 2), even a memorial of long dead

Sengoku era⁴³ war chief (Junko vol. 7) and so forth. All but Mutsumi endure this only out of desire to be Serinuma's boyfriend.

Serinuma's fifth suitor is not a man, but a fellow fujoshi, Nishina. When they meet Nishina is in male cosplay and saves Serinuma from a disgusting otaku man trying to take upskirt photos of her at a dōjinshi event (Junko vol. 2, 142-149). Serinuma is left with the impression of Nishina being a male, but she is quickly revealed when they run into each other in Serinuma's school. Nishina is beautiful and androgynous, with short hair and evoking the glamorous feel of the famous male role players of all female Takarazuka theatre, the otokoyaku, as Nishina's grumbling rivals point out (Junko vol. 3, 9). Thus, she does not embody a normative feminine position even before she declares her same-sex desire for Serinuma. Rather, Nishina is coded similarly as the otokoyaku she is associated with, described by Jennifer Robertson (1998, 68-69) as being sexed as female and gendered as men, making a possible romantic relationship with her homosexual but heterogendered.

As a romantic interest Nishina has a complicated status, she is perceived as a formidable rival by the male suitors, but maintains a joking mien to Serinuma with whom she forms a tight knit fujoshi friendship within the first day they are acquainted. It is revealed that she has fallen for Serinuma already when she was overweight, but she was unable to identify her after her sudden transformation (Junko vol. 6, 109-115). Nishina also steals Serinuma's first kiss using her humorous manner as cover (Junko vol. 3, 36-37). Afterwards, Serinuma tries to convince herself it was all a joke and kissing a girl does not matter in the all-important context of her first kiss, but to no avail (ibid. 44-48).

Behind the joking mien Nishina is serious with her feelings for Serinuma, but Serinuma herself never answers those feelings in the way Nishina would like. The way Nishina's homosexual desire towards Serinuma is depicted is not entirely homophobic, and after the initial shock all the suitors of Serinuma treat her as an equal or even a worse threat than the other male rivals. In the eyes of these boys she does not lose her gendered intelligibility with her same sex desire, they are not disgusted with her, nor do they ridicule what could be perceived as irrational desire in contrast to their heterosexual, conventional desire. This being said, the reader knows from the start, that

⁴³ Sengoku era (ca. 1467-1603) is an era of warring and social upheaval in Japanese history. It is also an era of warlike cultural heroes many of which still frequently appear in popular media. Similarly to the Three Kingdoms era of Chinese history, there are fujoshi who are fans of the era, pairing the famous generals into homosexual relationships (which were actually rather common in those days, too, see Pflugfelder, 1999, Leupp 1995 and Watanabe and Iwata, 1989).

Nishina stands no chance as a romantic interest. This is mainly due to the fact Mutsumi is such a strong suitor from the first chapter onwards (Junko vol. 1, 39-40), rather than the outright disclaiming of a possibility for female same sex desire and love. That being said, she is implied as being the least feasible suitor in many occasions, for example in an online game battle royale for the right to date Serinuma she is the first one defeated (Junko vol. 9, 140-141), and Mutsumi, naturally wins the tournament. Mutsumi's strength is due to him not really even courting Serinuma at all, his feelings for her are the perfect example of pure, innocent love, more of which in the chapter of fujoshi in love with other humans.

After the initial revelation of Serinuma's fujoshihood is made, there is little effort on her, nor A-chan's or Nishina's, part to remain closeted, instead they rather openly discuss anything and everything fujoshi-like crossing their minds, in school and outside of it. The other suitors, apart from Mutsumi, also often express surprise and even disgust at the behaviour of the girls, but none of them lose their desire for Serinuma due to her behaviour, even if it lessens her appeal as a female in their eyes.

The physique of the fujoshi trio Serinuma, A-chan and Nishina is the most malleable of all of the characters in Watamote, which leans rather heavily on bodymodificationary humour, where the pictorial representations of the feelings of the characters are exaggerated to an extreme extent in their physical bodies for comedic effect. The green monster of Tonari no 801-chan is no longer present, but when the fujoshi go overboard their lust and love for male same-sex desire the result is rarely pretty, both literally and figuratively, figure 12 shows an example of fujoshi desire. The message is clear: such emotions, and especially the displaying of such emotions is not beautiful nor lady like. It is a disruption in the gendered matrix, a hideous deviation, which temporarily corrupts the entire body. But if the female is otherwise attractive enough possible suitors might overlook this flaw. This message is also clearly internalised within the story: fujoshi desire is not itself attractive in a female, but something tarnishing and unsightly.

There is no similar transformation towards ugliness with the otaku of Kuragehime, even if Tsukimi does on occasion go into an awakened 'otakumode' when getting deeply absorbed in her jellyfish drawings and designs. She is also superiorly effective worker in this mode, even if removed from reality. Her physique does not change much either, the absence of pupils in her eyes and the determined set of her mouth are the only bodily signifiers to her altered mental state (Higashimura vol. 6, 76-77). The difference between these two modes is rather drastic, but then again fujoshi have

chosen a path of self-denigration from their own name onwards, which would make the fact that they depict even themselves as monstrous and ugly when indulging their forbidden and disgusting lust for same-sex erotica. There is little of the hope of Carola Bauer's wish to see female desire towards male same-sex love and sex as something as natural as the mirrored male desire of female homosexuality in Watamote (2013, 2-4).



Figure 12 Fujoshi desire turns the beautiful Serinuma and Nishina into vacant eyed idiots sprouting nonsense. Watamote volume 13 pages 24-25.

This is all of course also following the more general trend of regarding female non-reproductive sexual desire as something unwanted and even unthinkable in the Japanese modern era thought, described by Sonia Ryang among others (2006). Even if, like Itō Junko (2010) has described, there has certainly been development towards liberation of feminine sexuality, but the progress has been slow. Nor has the gradual liberation really meant a more accepting view towards feminine sexuality outside of marriage and childbearing, at least when speaking of the “respectable” part of the female

population, like for example the sensationalist societal talk of “yellow cabs”⁴⁴ in 1990’s Japan proves. These were women depicted as loose, “insatiable sluts” and endangering towards Japanese cultural cohesion and racial purity as they sought to have sexual liaisons with foreigners. (Kelsky 2001, 133-134) Sex tourism and the consumption of pornography by men of course remained unquestioned and under the radar at the same time (McLelland 2000a, 57).

Watamote aside, the physicality of the other fujoshi in the other manga is not shown to be as monstrous as they engage in their homoerotic desire. Koyanagi and Narumi, the office lady fujoshi of *Wotakoi*, are depicted as two cool samurai when first speaking of and then disagreeing about the seme/uke structure of a new series they like. What we see in the figure number 13 is the violence of disagreement in the order of the pairing. So, even in *Wotakoi* the fujoshi desire is something transformative, but it no longer needs to be depicted something unsightly. These bodily changes, which do not necessarily happen on the actual, physical reality -level of the story tied to sexual desire would indeed be an interesting field for further study with a wider sample.

In *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* the fujoshi Rumi starts the story also in the closet. She is introduced to the story when Gucchi spies her reading fujoshilike tweets on Twitter and is superbly happy, as he has so far lacked any rotten comrades with whom to share his interests (*Michinoku* vol. 1, 70). She quickly becomes a rotten senpai to Gucchi, helping him along the fudanshi path by taking him to *dōjinshi* events and accompanying him to buy BL and *shōjo* manga. After this initial shock of revelation not much attention is devoted to pondering whether or not fujoshi and fudanshi are in conflict with the mainstream society or not. Except in the context of heterosexual love, more on which in the chapter on fujoshi and love with real people. Outwardly nothing changes in Rumi before and after the revelation, she is a conventionally pretty young woman, and stays so almost the entire series, with the exception of a short period of overweightness. Rumi is horrified by this turn of events, even if she does not become as unintelligibly unattractive as Chieko and Serinuma are in their overweight forms in the eyes of others, her state receives much commenting on by her male friends Gucchi and Daigo. In the end she returns to her original form in the beginning of the next chapter and no mention of her weight is ever made again, nor on how she lost weight (*Michinoku* vol. 4, 17-24).

⁴⁴ Yellow cabs being an allusion to the racist notion of Asians as “yellow” and the women being sexually easy to “get into and out of”, just like riding a taxi.



Figure 13 The fujoshi OL Koyanagi and Narumi disagreeing on the seme/uke structure of a pairing. Compare to figure number 12. Wotakoi volume 3 page 32.

Rumi actually comes from a fujoshi family, with her mother as the source, who has raised two fujoshi daughters. The mother is out of the closet with her husband, too. While the man has accepted his wife's hobbies, he is sad that both his daughters also became fujoshi (Michinoku vol. 3, 20-21). Thus, the opinion of the man has indeed some weight in the matter, but Rumi's father is seen by Gucci and Rumi as an ideal existence as a person who is open enough to embrace even the not-so-socially

acceptable personality traits in those he loves. Indeed, such a situation is in no way common, as most fujoshi informants in studies made by both Okabe and Ishida (in Itō et.al2012) and Galbraith (2011a and 2015 in McLelland et.al.) agree on how no one wants to date a fujoshi.

5.2.2. Fujoshi in the office

The fujoshi main characters of *Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii* (Wotakoi for short), Narumi and Koyanagi, are conventionally attractive office ladies nearing the dreaded age of 30. Neither of them express any anxiety over this looming deadline, though, and both are deep in the closet in the work environment.

The friendship formation of the main fujoshi friends begins with a chance encounter with Narumi's childhood friend Hirotaka at a new workplace where Narumi has just started. He flat-out inquires after Narumi's otaku tendencies. This reveals a hint of otaku in both of the women as the two involuntarily react to his blunt question. (Fujita vol. 1, 3-5) The encounter leads to Narumi wanting to ascertain if Koyanagi truly is an otaku too, but by asking she would reveal herself as one, making the process of finding otaku friends a precarious one. Furthermore, there is an added layer of danger with Koyanagi: while she might not be a normie mainstream person, or a *hiwota*⁴⁵ in the lingua of the series, she could very well be just a regular otaku without fujoshi tendencies and could find Narumi a distasteful troglodyte. In the end Narumi spies a picture of a familiar cosplayer on Koyanagi's smartphone and gets her confirmation of a fellow fujoshi in the office (Fujita vol. 4, 89-92).

The duo is extremely happy about their friendship, but keep their fujoshi side hidden at work. The hiding of non-normative identities seems to be a given rather than an exception in Japanese working environments, many feel work is a part of the public sphere and mixing one's private life into it is not desirable. For example, some of the gay men interviewed by Mark McLelland stated in the reasons for not coming out at one's workplace (or with one's family) they feel one's sexual orientation is a private matter and therefore not something one should bring with himself to the public as it would cause trouble to the ones who would know (2000, 195-198). While on the other hand it is socially acceptable to pester unmarried people for their lack of marriage also at the public sphere of the workplace. Being an otaku is not as big a leap aside the heteronormative structures

⁴⁵非ヲタ a non-otaku, or a normie.

of Japanese society, but otaku feel similarly unable to share their preferences and identities in work and familial environments (Ingulsrud and Allen, 2010, 183).

So, the process of performing the mainstream heterosexual identities on the outside is already deeply ingrained within the psyches of Narumi and Koyanagi, and outwardly both embody the form of an office lady perfectly, they dress smartly, are beautiful and work diligently. Neither express any discontent about the contradiction between their true selves and these working identities, but have accepted this way of life as a given.

5.2.3. Other fujoshi

The university age fujoshi in my data are mostly very minor characters. There is a fujoshi trio introduced in *Mashita no Fudanshi-kun* as the friends of the fudanshi Motoi, who is a university student, but their exact age and societal status is never delved into. Rumi's big sister Yumi from *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* is the only explicitly university age fujoshi introduced.

Then there are the older ladies: the mothers of Chieko and Rumi & Yumi, who have performed their duty as Japanese women, i.e. gotten married and had their children. While it is not clear if Chieko's mother was already a fan of South Korean idols when she was raising Chieko, it is abundantly clear the now widowed woman feels it is her right to fawn over them, as she has taken care of her societal responsibilities by raising Chieko. Nor does she feel she has any need to hide her hobbies, on the contrary she is very vocal about them with those she meets, and can for example easily be bribed with promises of tickets to live shows and the like. She also decides to sell her house, the *Amamizukan*, to afford to buy a new one in South Korea, disregarding her poor daughter completely, who would become homeless if she did so. Not to mention the rest of the *Amāzu*.

In *Kuragehime* volume 12 Chieko's mother gets into a fight with Mayaya, one of her tenants, over their life choices, as she scolds through her all of them for neglecting their duties as humans and women by not working, not having any plans for the future, which also entails performing the feminine duty getting married and having children in her eyes. She finds the lot of them detestable and failed. (79-84)

The mother of Yumi and Rumi does not play a big role in *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* yet, but Rumi reveals that she has taken her to *dōjinshi* events already when she was a child. She has had no qualms about raising her children into fans of female oriented homoerotica. (*Michinoku* vol. 1, 138-139) Therefore, for her at least, being a fujoshi is not something one should try to avoid in order to

be able to thrive in Japanese society. This being said, her daughter Yumi has learned to keep her tastes hidden by the time she is in high school and gets found out by Gucchi. Thus, it remains unclear if Rumi's mother was rebelling against the constraining norms of femininity in Japanese society when teaching her ways also to her children, and managing to convince her husband that being a fujoshi is something he needs to accept in his wife, or if she has sincerely felt it would not become a source for trouble for her daughters.

Fujoshi motherhood is an emerging theme in manga depicting fujoshi life with also Serinuma ending up as a fujoshi mother. She is by no means the first, though. Already in the manga 2008 *Fujoshi Kanojo* one of the supporting fujoshi characters got pregnant and was going to raise a fujoshi child. The actual process of raising fujoshi children was not depicted in the manga, though. Still, many young fujoshi seem to see fujoshihood as something one grows out of, or graduates from as they put it. Even so, they too seem to lapse back into their old selves after a short period of heterosexual relationship or even marriage and motherhood, as described by Patrick W. Galbraith's fujoshi informants in his 2011a (227-229). In a diversifying of the normative motherhood Japan these kinds of nerd mothers seem to be carving another new path into the old hegemonic ideal of monogamous and sexless nuclear family where the mother exists only to rear her children and has no sexual desires of her own. Even if this time too her sexuality does not involve the husband per sé.

5.2.4. Rotten girls in heterosexual relationships

There are two types of fujoshi attitudes towards romantic love with real people according to my data: the first type embodied by Watamote's main character Serinuma: she is a girl thoroughly satisfied with her homoerotic entertainment and feels that she does not need a romantic relationship with another person at all. The second type is embodied by the *Wotakoi* main women Narumi and Koyanagi, whose romantic and sexual desires exist in both the realm of homoerotic entertainment and real life heterosexual affairs. Nor are these realms in conflict with each other. This second type is also much more common compared to the first, Serinuma's friend A-chan is already in this category even if she is a high schooler, as the absent girlfriends of the boys Kuresawa and Ogasawara (from the series *Sasaki to Miyano*) also seem to be as they have acquired boyfriends. Furthermore, Serinuma's migration from the first category to the second forms the backbone of Watamote's story.

This migration is a good example of the different levels of fujoshi desire and different types of love depicted in the series. Serinuma's schoolmates Igarashi, Nanashima and Shinomiya take an interest in her only after she loses weight and turns suddenly beautiful. The attraction all three feel for Serinuma is therefore shallow, not pure. This sort of superficial, erotic love the trio feel cannot compete with deeper love felt by other characters, not even after each aforementioned boy gets a story arc of their own where they realise there is more to Serinuma than just her looks. In their eyes, the Serinuma who was not intelligible as a woman, only emerges an object of heterosexual desire, after she is made to fit the mold of a conventionally attractive female. This process is identical to the way Shuu falls in love with Tsukimi's feminised form in *Kuragehime*, and fails to connect the two modes as one person until volume 6 of the manga (33-34). The narrow mold of feminine desirability of heterosexist capitalist society is made abundantly clear with the desire of these men, and both stories resist this ideal if not completely but at least to an extent.

The only one who instantly recognises Serinuma after her transformation is Mutsumi-senpai. Mutsumi does not realise the romantic nature of his own feelings towards Serinuma until volume 5 of the series after being interrogated by the other rivals. The fact that he has, in his own words, loved Serinuma for a long time, but not realised it (Junko vol. 5, 69-70), is a clear indication of the purity of his love, he loves Serinuma for her soul and not her body, and more importantly she is his first and only love. Not even her ugly, fangirlish tendencies deter him, and furthermore outside of her flaws Serinuma embodies many qualities of the typical virginal shōjo heroine: tenacity, kindness and cheerfulness (Prough 2011, 51). To Mutsumi, the normative performance of a bodily gender is not a thing he cares about, nor maybe even recognises, for his love is rather all encompassing in nature. Just as *Kuragehime*'s Kuranosuke falls in love with Tsukimi the human, not Tsukimi the beautiful girl.

Mutsumi's pursuit of Serinuma is devoid of sexual lust, his love is the sort of pure (as in not-sexual, physical) romantic love which has gained status as a cultural ideal of love in Japan in the 20th century, known as *jun'ai*⁴⁶ or *ren'ai*⁴⁷ and has enjoyed popularity in romantic movies, television dramas and books (see Ryang 2006 for *jun'ai*, 64-94 and Shamoon 2012 for *ren'ai*, 20-27). In the *jun'ai* stories a virginal man and a virginal woman fall in love, face many hardships for their love and either of them

⁴⁶純愛 translated to pure love. See also Shoji 2004.

⁴⁷恋愛 translates to spiritual love. For simplicity's sake I will refer to the term *jun'ai* in this thesis in the context of these two names for similar kind of love.

might even die in the end to preserve the love in its height and purity. No sexual liaisons usually happen, and the story often ends while the love is still unconsummated, leaving the not-so-romantic depictions of everyday married life out. These stories stand in contrast to the sexually looser atmosphere of Edo period Japan, where virginity was not elevated to the high fetishistic status it now enjoys (Ryang 2006, 64-94).

Ren'ai on the other hand was a term coined during the Meiji period to denote a spiritual kind of love and set apart from the carnality of pre-modern ideas of love. In ren'ai too, the physical sexuality was seen as tarnishing the purity of the spiritual love (Shamoon 2012, 18-20). It also needs to be noted, that contemporary shōjo manga can and often does feature sexual themes rather openly (Prough 2011, 112-113), and Watamote definitely has its titillating moments, as the more aggressive suitors pursue Serinuma.

Holding true to the jun'ai ideal, Mutsumi's presence is not threateningly sexual, nor does he make aggressive, often borderline unwanted, advances on Serinuma, as the other suitors are prone on doing. In fact his advances cumulate into a hug he suddenly gives Serinuma when he realises the true nature of his feelings (Junko vol. 5, 35-37), and keeping her warm after they have been stranded together on a deserted island in the middle of a storm. Both of these encounters are not aggressive or sexual in nature (Junko vol. 7, 96-100). Thus, the rivals destined to lose keep the sexually exciting parts of the story going, while the asexual Mutsumi slowly wins the fujoshi heart.

He embodies a mode of nonthreatening masculinity, one which does not seek to own, subjugate or sexually conquer the person nor the body it desires, a nonsexual being. In this Mutsumi shares much with the adult otaku Hirotaka (the boyfriend of Narumi in *Wotakoi*): they are both considered good looking but not assertive, they are patient with the antics of their lovers, both have loved the main character as long as they have known them and both are considered socially awkward in the way they disregard or fail to understand heteronormative etiquette⁴⁸. There are, of course, differences: Mutsumi is not an otaku himself, unlike Hirotaka he proclaims his undying love to Serinuma rather melodramatically and after their love relationship is established Mutsumi and Serinuma progress much faster than their adult counterparts, from kissing to discussing the possibility of attempting sex to marriage proposals within the course of the three last tankōbon (volumes 12 to 14). This also

⁴⁸ While in the case of Hirotaka this social ineptitude springs from disinterest in societal rules and etiquette, Mutsumi is genuinely unaware of them and is famous for his all encompassing asexual love towards all of the suitors, whom he considers his friends, as well as Serinuma. He is often referred to as an angel or a Buddha due to this.

breaks the *jun'ai* trope, where the story must end before sex comes into the picture, as described by Ryang (2006). The pair explores their sexuality with mutual consent and on their own terms, neither pressures the other into trying sex. Furthermore, they only manage to consummate their relationship after they agree on getting married, protecting Serinuma's chastity. The sex scenes that have proliferated in heterosexual *shōjo* manga (especially in magazines aimed towards the older end of the *shōjo* demographic) since the 1990s do not necessarily need a marriage proposal to happen, like in *Watamote* (Prough 2011, 111-112), making this aspect of *Watamote* in no way symptomatic of the entire *shōjo* manga world.

The format of *Watamote* is in no way revolutionary within the context of *shōjo* manga where the concept of virginal, spiritual love and ugly ducklings getting the prince at the end (of a usually comedic story) have been a stable trope for decades (Fujimoto Yukari quoted in Shamoon 2012, 104 and Prough 2011, 51). What is different in these stories is how the main girl does not find bliss in "sacrificing herself to the boy for love in a formulaic Cinderella story" as Fujimoto puts it (translated in Shamoon 2012, 104), but the nerd girls get to stay nerds and the men accept them as they are. The difference between these two love stories is that Mutsumi achieves heterosexual nuclear family bliss in the end and the topic marriage is consistently avoided in *Wotakoi*, the couples staying within a safe zone of casualty.

Nonetheless, if we compare these relationships and depictions of sexuality to the heterosexual pornography of ladies' comics, which have been criticised extensively for their heterosexist approach on sexuality (see for example, Allison 1996, Itō 2010 and King 2011 & Shamoon in Jones et.al 2005 in their defense), the differences are striking. Where the porno in ladies' comics resembles the modes and style of generic male-oriented porn, often fading the male partner into the background and focusing on the female body in the throes of passion, Mutsumi and Hirotaka are very explicitly present visually and offer a rather different mold for a desirable man; kind, considerate, not aggressively sexual and who manage to desire a *fujoshi* as a lover. They both differ also from the masculinities represented in BL, where the *seme* is often very aggressive towards the object of his interest. A fact Serinuma also has to acknowledge when she is subjected to unwanted advances on the behalf of her other suitors, reading about being coerced into sex might be titillating but actually being the object of similar advances is nowhere near nice (*Junko* vol. 8, 19-21).

Towards the end of the story Serinuma finally comes into terms with her own feelings for Mutsumi, realising what Narumi and Koyanagi already know in the beginning of *Wotakoi*: she can have a

heterosexual relationship with Mutsumi while maintaining her fujoshi identity. However, the story does not simply end with a “and they lived happily ever after” then and there. Instead, the reality of living with a passionate fujoshi are revealed to Mutsumi, who unlike the boyfriends of Narumi and Koyanagi, does not share her otaku identity (more on these adult relationship on the subchapter of otaku men dating fujoshi). The eccentric but non-otaku Mutsumi gets well and truly hurt by Serinuma’s fannish antics overriding her common sense leading to missed dates and neglect of Mutsumi.

In the BL manga Sasaki to Miyano there are two absent fujoshi girlfriends who are dated by the friends of the main pair: Kuresawa and Ogasawara, whom are both also not otaku. They represent two different ways in which the partner of a fujoshi can face this aspect of their loved one. Kuresawa, Miyano’s classmate, is madly in love with his girlfriend and happily announces he loves her fujoshi tendencies and all (Harusono vol. 2, 61). While Ogasawara, Sasaki’s classmate, is fighting with his girlfriend because he found out about her hardcore fujoshi tendencies and is afraid his girlfriend secretly has homoerotic fantasies about him. This fact unsettles him on a profound level: the idea that his girlfriend would fantasise about him getting raped by men is almost too much to handle for Ogasawara. He still loves his girlfriend despite her tendencies, and after Miyano has given him advice on the inner workings of fujoshi he gets more confidence in his attempt to make up with her. (ibid. 57-61 and 87-93) In both cases the fujoshi side of a girl is not desirable, but it can be overcome. This holds true with all of the fujoshi in my data: fujoshihood is something no man wants in his girlfriend, but if her redeeming qualities are good enough, it can be tolerated. Especially since all of the fujoshi visually presented in the manga, regardless of age, outwardly perform the physical role of a normatively attractive female adequately, would they be physically ugly the story would certainly be very different, as we see in the lack of interest Serinuma is given by males before her transformation.

Watamote on the other hand goes well beyond reconciling and settling for a fujoshi as a romantic partner. The problems Mutsumi and Serinuma face are presented as obstacles the duo must overcome to achieve their ultimate true love. After the last hurdles are done with readers are presented with a very short depiction of Serinuma and Mutsumi’s adult married life (around ten years after the events of the main story, making all the characters around 27 years old). The life is idealised and sugary, emphasising how they truly are the epitome of heterosexual bliss together as a married heteronuclear family, but one where the mother gets to be a fujoshi at least. She has

named their son after her favorite anime character and is working in the anime industry she so well and truly loves, there has been no need to subjugate herself completely to the heteromarrriage and erase her former personhood to achieve motherhood. A-chan has also married, though nothing of her partner and her status of being closeted or not is revealed. Nishina, the female suitor of Serinuma, on the other hand has remained single, but is successful in the manga industry (Junko vol. 14).

Together Mutsumi and Hirotaka and their relationships with the fujoshi main characters, could be seen as a representation of a new type of heterosexual romance in women's manga. One that also seeks to normalise the niche nerd identities, as none of the women in the manga studied has to shed their otaku identity in order to be worthy of love, nor does the finding of love render the fujoshi sexuality obsolete. On the other hand, the male and the female must both be conventionally attractive, i.e. to be intelligible, in order to be worthy of love in both series, even if looks supposedly do not matter. This is even when Mutsumi's feelings do not change with the changes in Serinuma's body, as she returns to her original overweight form several times during the course of the series. The other suitors either want her to lose weight and go back to her thin form, or try to overfeed her in order to achieve the rounded form they see as desirable. While these characters who prefer Serinuma in her overweight form are mostly a side note: Mitsuboshi Takeru, who kidnaps Serinuma to marry her, and the female suitor Nishina, who also happily pursues her when she is thin. It is still refreshing to see, that while most of the attention is given to Serinuma as she is thin, her overweight does not render her completely unlovable in the eyes of the entire cast. This being said, after the relationship between Mutsumi and Serinuma has been established she keeps to her thin form, apart from her pregnancy during which she is returned to her original form, but only temporarily even then (Junko, vol. 14).

If we compare these fujoshi themed manga to the first wave of fujoshi manga, the ones with male perspective, in terms of romantic liaisons not much has changed. In the former stories too, the women found ways with which to coerce their loving if horrified males into letting them continue on their rotten path, while maintaining the heterosexual love relationship with them. Even the tone of the stories was a comedy with an emphasis on the craziness of fujoshi, only viewed from the outside and from a strictly male perspective (see Hester in McLelland et. al. 2015, 176-184). Watamote maintains a similar stance, even if the point of view has sifted from the non-otaku boyfriends to the fujoshi herself. The decidedly mundane depiction of otaku/fujoshi life in Wotakoi

is an exception as the boyfriends are also members of a similar cast of outsiders, the discrepancy between the couple's identities does not exist.

Then there are the fujoshi who do not need a heterosexual relationship to achieve happiness. Rumi from *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* is a single woman. The horrors of heterosexual desire do not worm their way into her life like they do with Serinuma, even as she is a conventionally attractive girl and femininely intelligible in every other way. Nakamura, the normal friend of Gucchi, the fudanshi main character of the series, agonizes over how Rumi and Gucchi should be together. In his eyes the pair is meant to be, especially when he observes them gushing over whichever fujoshi/danshi-like thing they happen to be obsessing over at the moment (for example *Michinoku* vol. 4, 19). The possibility of her and Gucchi forming a pair is briefly discussed but Rumi asserts that as they have formed a rotten camaraderie she no longer can "turn into a female (*mesu*⁴⁹) for Gucchi". In fact, both find the idea to be repulsive enough to give them collective chills. (*Michinoku* vol. 3, 16-19) Rumi does confess she would not mind eventually getting married, though, but the possibility of finding one with whom she could be open about her fujoshi side seems like a farfetched idea for her.

Then there are the three fujoshi friends of fudanshi Motoi in *Mashita no fudanshi-kun*: Ichii, Tomonaga and Inushima. While their love life is not delved into in detail it is revealed that Motoi, the main fudanshi of *Mashita no Fudanshi-kun*, almost ended up dating one of them, Ichii, but their pairing was deemed impossible by both parties as their tastes in BL and yaoi are in conflict. The surprise Inushima and Tomonaga express after it is revealed that Motoi and Ichii are not dating implies neither of them are in a relationship either (*Kuroiwa* vol. 1, 73-74). While Gucchi and Rumi express no such incompatibility in taste as a hindrance for pair formation, these two stories at least see romantic pair formation between fujoshi and fudanshi is not possible, even if seemingly it would be ideal as both parties possess a similar outsider identity. No concrete conclusions can of course be made from a sample this small, but it is a definite field for further studies.

5.3. Otaku men

The data reveals several different stances towards the male otaku character and his romantic relations, or lack of them at that. Therefore, I will also break this chapter into several subchapters in order of age, identity, societal status and of course romantic liaisons.

⁴⁹ She uses the biological term denoting female animals *mesu*(メス), to further emphasize the sordid notion of her and Gucchi's impossible relationship.

5.3.1. Wotakoi and salaryman otaku

The focus of *Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii* is the life of four *shakaijin* (responsible adult) otaku and *fujoshi*: two couples, who work in the same generic company office. In this chapter I will focus on the males of these pairs, the two salaryman otaku, Kabakura and Hirotaka.

Both of the men are in their late twenties, so the societal deadline of marrying is also looming over them, for the pressure to marry is definitely not only a female problem as the studies by Dasgupta (in Dasgupta and McLelland 2005, 168-181) and McLelland (2000) show. The top hegemonic masculine ideal of contemporary Japan has since the 1960s been the male breadwinner salaryman, a father and a husband on top of being a relentless worker (Dasgupta in Dasgupta and McLelland 2005, 169). Not to mention the fact that salarymen remaining unmarried in their adulthood are regarded as deviants and often they stop receiving promotions (ibid. 173-175). Their superiors might also interfere and find them prospective wife candidates in order to avoid the horrible fate of adult singlehood (ibid. 100). Interestingly, none of this pressure can be spied on the pages of *Wotakoi*.

Kabakura is slightly older than Hirotaka, and holds a higher position within the company hierarchy. He performs the mainstream heterosexual male identity impeccably, even if he is known for hotheadedness within the private circle of friends. Kabakura is also sometimes described as a “light otaku”, i.e. someone who is not as deep in the game as the other otaku (for example Fujita vol. 4, 40), while in other places he is referred to as an *aniwota* (アニヲタ), meaning an otaku focusing on anime. Thus, his otakuness might not be as a big part of his personality as it is for the others. However, he is shown to be a rather enthusiastic fan of anime already in high school in a flashback retelling how he met his longtime girlfriend Koyanagi. At that time Koyanagi herself was anything but an otaku, therefore Kabakura’s role in her identity shift has been substantial. In fact, at first she is rather disgusted with Kabakura’s methods of self-motivation in sports: imagining himself as the main character of his favorite anime and singing the theme song in his head to get himself pumped up (Fujita vol. 4, 82). Furthermore, Kabakura was already in the closet when he was a teenager, for the couple gets to know each other as Koyanagi blackmails Kabakura with a picture she has secretly taken of him buying anime character goods. Kabakura’s reaction to this picture is rather extreme and violent, suggesting he feels, that otaku hobbies do not mix well with a normatively masculine role of being a volleyball team captain. (ibid. 44) This notion carries over to his adult life, where he is extremely reluctant to reveal his otakuness to outsiders. For example Kabakura expresses dislike to the idea of going to buy manga together with his otaku friends on the way home from work and

while dressed in work clothing. He does not wish to be identified as a *gachiwota*⁵⁰, or a salaryman otaku (Fujita vol. 3, 55). And indeed, even if many western accounts on Japanese manga culture enthusiastically tell the reader of how even adult salarymen sit in trains fully absorbed in manga, it is actually not really considered proper behaviour for an adult (Ingulsrud and Allen 2010, 24).

The hardcore gamer otaku Hirotaka on the other hand does not quite manage to perform the role of ideal salaryman masculinity. His salaryman manners are not perfect as he tends to speak in a too colloquial manner at work, of which he gets scolded (Fujita vol. 2, 102). He also ignores the social pressure to do voluntary overwork (which is expected of employees, leading sometimes to the sad cases of *karōshi*: death by overwork) and is not ashamed about coming to work tired due to just playing all night (ibid. 22). Furthermore, he does not try to hide his nerdish identity at work, unlike Kabakura, even if it makes people whisper behind his back. He still does not embody a stereotypical physical demeanour of an unruly otaku male who has rejected society. Instead he looks like a rather normal salaryman: neatly dressed even if his hair is a bit ruffled. Many of his female coworkers consider him good looking, even if his gamer side is deemed less than desirable (for example Fujita vol. 4, 70).

Hirotaka is also shown as a gamer in the flashbacks recounting the relationship of him and Narumi as children, he felt no conflict between his gamer identity and the wider society even as a child. Or rather, he was as uninterested in the opinion of an abstract mainstream then as he is now. The only disruption he had in his indifference happened when they were a bit older and Narumi started getting interested in other boys. These boys are shown to be “cooler” bad boy types with pierced ears and the like. Hirotaka who already loved Narumi, as is only proper for a man in pure love, tried to emulate these boys by piercing his ears. Of course, it did not have the desired effect, as Narumi ignored him in any romantic sense. (Fujita vol. 2, 104-105) He also has clearly not turned his back on society, as he has drifted through the schooling system and landed a proper, adult job at the office. He has acted the part of a male in Japanese society adequately, if not perfectly then at least adequately, and has avoided any attempts at correcting his deviation from the norms.

Neither of the men are shown to have become an otaku due to personal trauma, like Tsukimi, the main character of *Kuragehime*, nor is their otakuness shown as a personality flaw in need of fixing. Kabakura is especially well adjusted as an adult man, even if he is in the closet with his otakuness

⁵⁰ ガチヲタ Gachi means serious, diligent or earnest.

and prefers to remain so. Thus, the identity of an otaku is shown to be in conflict with the mainstream expectation of how a man should be and behave, i.e. not a part of the performance of a normative heterosexual male in the world of Wotakoi. Nevertheless, this conflict is not so violent that the individual sporting both the masculine and the otaku identity would become haunted by the discrepancy. Nor do people deviating slightly from the norms like Hirotaka become so unintelligible that some sort of measures would be necessary to redeem him. The biggest problem from his otakuness he faces is not being considered perfect dating material by the office ladies of his workplace. This is in the vein of the otaku stereotype of being undesirable and failing at heterosexual performance. Hirotaka of course does not have the full set of antisocial traits which are stereotypically attached to otaku identities, like for example a lack of personal grooming. Where the line between acceptable and unacceptable goes, remains vague in Wotakoi, but at least the mere fact someone is an otaku does not suffice as a reason to completely ostracise someone, as is the case with Hirotaka.

5.3.2. The stereotypical otaku of Watamote

Watashi ga motete dōsunda does not have many encounters with heterosexual male otaku, and when the characters do encounter these types, the encounter is never a friendly one. Rather the male otaku is almost always shown in an antagonising light: they are rude, ugly, sometimes overweight, self-centered and antisocial. One otaku man tries to take upskirt pictures of the main character Serinuma at a dōjinshi event (Junko vol. 2, 142-145). Later in the story, a group of adult male fans of little girls' anime disrupt a live show with their unruly behaviour and attempt to peek under the performers' skirts (one of whom is Serinuma, in Junko vol. 8, 29-37). These perform a rather straightforward role of minor villains, never having much of a personality, nor redeeming qualities. These depictions use the negative stereotype of otaku and use it shamelessly, and plays to enforce the negative stereotype even further.

There is also one slightly longer story arc featuring otakulike men, who stalk one of the suitors of Serinuma, the young and beautiful Shinomiya, because he performed the cross-gender role of their favorite anime character, Princess Usamimi, in a live-action show at an amusement park. In their eyes they are protecting him (or her as they see him), also providing him with food. They do not self-identify as otaku, but their behaviour evokes similar feelings as the unruly otaku fans of girls' anime, who made a mess out of the anime live show mentioned earlier. One of the men goes

overboard in his affection towards the Princess Usamimi of his dreams, starting to threaten Shinomiya when he has friends over in his house (Shinomiya lives alone despite his young age).

In the climax of the story arc this stalker goes as far as to break into Serinuma's house where Shinomiya is hiding and threatening them both with a knife. This man, shown in figure number 14 is depicted as ugly and with bad teeth embodies the threatening nature associated with otaku (Watamote vol. 9, 30), and especially their sexuality, as the man stalks another he sees as the embodiment of a female anime character. To make the matter even worse, it is a character from a show intended for young girls. This invokes the ghost of the lolicon loving otaku of 1980s, the horrid culmination of whom was the child murderer Miyazaki Tsutomu, at least in the otaku mythos of mainstream Japanese media. Thus, he is delusional and unlike the ugly but harmless fujoshi, a danger to those around him: threatening violence in his jealousy over the chastity of an imagined anime character, disregarding the human being behind the character. His masculine, if failed, irrational sexuality is a source of danger and thoroughly unwanted.

In the context of gendered performativity and intelligibility these people fall short on both accounts. They are unable to perform the role of normative masculinity, and are shown as irredeemable in both their physique and the psychology. These men have fallen outside the sphere of heterosexual desirability even if their bodies are marked as having the male sex, they are not completely outside the binary matrix as they desire the "opposite" sex, but inhabit its lowest stratas. They stand in stark contrast with the good looking, normal suitors of Serinuma, never qualifying as partners for her, or any other female they encounter in the series. Even the villainous Kazuma and Mitsuboshi who attempt to vie for the heart of Serinuma with very dubious methods like kidnapping, are shown in more positive light, as intelligible men. Both are popular among women, and with men too, performing a much more aggressively male role than these losers ever could hope for.



Figure 14 Ugly and threatening otaku sexuality in Watamote volume 9 page 30

The only slight exception are the not-so-threatening Usamimi fans who were “protecting” Shinomiya. They are shown as men of rather questionable ideas, but as they agree to disband their club at the request of the main characters, they are shown having at least some common sense. Nor does their desire to care for and protect the imaginary Princess Usamimi embodied by the male Shinomiya ever crossover to an actual wish to touch him in the flesh. Nonetheless, this behaviour is in no way acceptable in the eyes of the characters, or as a part of performing a male role, even if it entails some elements of normative masculine behaviour like protecting the ones you love.

5.3.3. The non-otaku otaku of Kuragehime

Hanamori, the chauffeur of Koibuchi family in Kuragehime, is labeled a Mercedes Benz otaku by the Amāzu: he has encyclopedic knowledge of the cars, can only draw them (and nothing else) and can be blackmailed into doing anything if someone threatens the cars of Koibuchi family. But as he acts as a proper member of his sex: working, well dressed and heterosexually active (even if he lacks the married nuclear family that is the epitome of normative masculinity) and does not self-identify his obsessive interest as otakuness. With these traits combined, he escapes the otaku stain.

Another character is one who is presented outside the storylines of Kuragehime, in the so called bonus manga, where the mangaka Higashimura Akiko records the happenings of her everyday life in a very diary-like manner. In the bonus of volume 13 Higashimura introduces her new husband. He is a very stern and cool looking fashion designer, but from within whom a voice actor otaku emerges suddenly when the man hears his idol is voice acting one the roles in Kuragehime's anime adaptation. Here Higashimura ponders if it is only the outward appearance of anime merchandise, uncleanliness and things like being overweight or having long hair that make an otaku, that there are many undercover otaku. Otaku has gained a status as a name of for a subculture, making otakuhood also a question of self-identification: one frames him/herself as one, starts performing like one and by doing so transforms into one. Okada Toshio describes the birth of otaku in his essay as starting as a derogatory label used to mark and other the people seen as uncool by the ones who labeled themselves as cool, which with time turned into a self-labeling for these people cut apart from the heteronormative mainstream realm (in Galbraith et.al. 2015, 164-165) Hanamori does not self-identify as otaku, and therefore he does not perform the role of an otaku, but a stylish and heterosexually active member of his sex, even if he does not fit into the hegemonic masculine ideal of a salaryman father.

The difference between Hanamori the chauffeur and the otaku is bigger though. Hanamori never tries to hide his interest in Mercedes Benzes, it is common knowledge in the Koibuchi family and no one thinks badly of him due to it. Only source of discontent is the fact he can be bribed or blackmailed into doing almost anything when the cars are involved, therefore, his enthusiasm is a weak point in his personality, but one that is not bad enough for him to be considered unfit to do his duty. To some extent it is also a question of what hobbies are perceived as being otaku-like, and what are "just hobbies" but as with the interest in voice acting of the new husband of Higashimura and the closeted salaryman otaku Hirotaka and Kabakura, we see, a man with stereotypically otaku

interests does not need to perform the outward role of an otaku either. He too, can of course be said to be in the closet, but as he is, he is a real life example of playing in both fields: being an otaku inside and fitting into heteronormativity outside.

Indeed, as the studies of Itō, Galbraith and others show, those people who identify as male otaku seem to have a tendency to go all out physically and mentally with their obsessions. While fujoshi in turn to stay in the closet, and in the context of these two stories gender and sex have nothing to do with it. The contrast between Hanamori the Amāzu of Kuragehime points in the same direction: otakuness is a matter of self-identification and it is the individual's choice whether or not they embody their otaku to the fullest, rejecting the mainstream society to pursue their interests, or stay in the closet forming secret sects where they can let loose.

5.3.4. Otaku men loving rotten women

The main content of *Wotakoi* is the depiction of everyday happenings of the two otaku-fujoshi couples and the chronicling of the past and the present of their respective loves. The fact that this series has sprung into rather substantial popularity (Anime News Network, 2017b), and very quickly at that, is a clear indication of how this series speaks to a considerable part of the Japanese manga reading population.

Both of the couples, Hirotaka and Narumi with Kabakura and Koyanagi, can be interpreted as being rather pure in the *jun'ai* sense Ryang described in her 2006 book, despite the series depicting already established relationships. While sexuality plays some part especially in the relationship between Kabakura and Koyanagi, both couples are in practice the first loves of each other. Koyanagi and Kabakura have dated each other since high school, and while Narumi has had a score of boyfriends, she is the first and maybe even the only love of Hirotaka. Their getting together is a sort of return to home, a rejection of mainstream masculinity for Narumi, even if she harbored no romantic feelings towards Hirotaka as a child. He is also the first lover she has had with whom she can show her fujoshi side, be herself, as with the others she had to hide her tastes in fear of rejection.

In fact the major problem in their slowly developing relationship consists of a lack of romantic or sexual tension between them. In part this is because of Hirotaka's antisocial nature, he is not good at expressing himself nor are his feelings ever very strong. Furthermore, neither is the other's type⁵¹:

⁵¹ タイプ (taipu) A loan word but one that is often used in Japanese in the context of what one wants in a romantic / sexual partner, or a homoerotic coupling or in an anime character to fawn over. It carries a lot of weight and often one's

Hirotaika likes big breasted mature women whereas Narumi is small and waiflike. Narumi herself comments to Koyanagi that she would much rather go out with Kabakura whom she finds more attractive, when Koyanagi inquires about the relationship progress of Narumi and Hirotaika. Narumi is yet unaware Kabakura and Koyanagi are a couple as this embarrassing encounter happens quite early in the relationship of the quartet (Fujita vol. 1, 26). Similarly, Koyanagi and Kabakura are not each other type, either, as Kabakura likes small and waiflike girls, while Koyanagi herself is a big breasted beauty. Koyanagi, on the other hand, often comments on how patient, calm and good looking Hirotaika is. Thus, there is a tension throughout the series that the couples are just settling for their respective partners, while the partner of the friend would be a more preferable mate for each character. The tension never grows to a full blown square-drama, though.

This tension does surface from time to time, as each character privately feels that their romantic partner is just settling with them, since they are unable to find better suited partners due to being otaku/fujoshi. Narumi has lost several boyfriends only because she was found out as a fujoshi. Koyanagi also feels Kabakura is only settling for her as it would be difficult for him to find another woman willing to tolerate his otakuhood, much less share his hobby. There is a general feel of otaku and fujoshi being few and far between in the series, even if the dōjinshi events they attend are shown bustling full of people.

Apart from this atmosphere of desolation on the part of all of the main characters, there is little problem per sé for otaku men to date fujoshi women. No humour springs out of the horrors of fujoshi, as the men are quite adjusted to all aspects of fujoshi life. Nor is there any exasperation on the strange ways of otaku from the part of the women. Things like attending dōjinshi events, which are portrayed as exotic weirdness in the other heterosexually oriented series, as well as in the first wave of manga focusing on fujoshi (Hester in McLelland et.al. 2015) are shown as everyday happenings in *Wotakoi*. There is also no all-encompassing homophobia on the part of Kabakura and especially Hirotaika, he reads BL manga offered to him without as much as a bat of the eye, and readily takes a risqué selfie of him and Kabakura in order to cheer Narumi up (Fujita vol. 1, 53), the normie-boys of *Watamote* express horror and disgust when they are subjected to similar situations. Kabakura on the other hands does not really enjoy the idea of BL and tries to refuse when Koyanagi

taipu seems to be a rather tight mold into which the partner needs to fit, for example the gay bars of Tōkyō's most famous gay bar district are rigidly divided by the type of men they cater to and it is often the topic of conversation, especially with new acquaintances (McLelland 2000a, 115-117)

offers him BL manga to read. His reactions are not those of surprised disgust and horror, just mild puzzlement, and he is easily swayed into seeing the charm of BL when Koyanagi asks him if his male-oriented lesbian erotic manga would work better as heterosexual love stories, like he proposes with BL. When he finally succumbs to Koyanagi's plea and reads a BL manga, he finds it to be very good. (Fujita vol. 4, 35-39)

As mentioned before, the topic of marriage is never raised within the pages of *Wotakoi*, even with the characters all over 25 years of age, and fitting more or less into the normative mold of salaryman and office lady. The need for a romantic partner is not tied to marriage in their eyes. For Narumi, who seems to be particularly keen on having a boyfriend, there is no need or pressure to settle down looming behind this eagerness. Koyanagi and Kabakura, who have been together for close to ten years at the beginning of the manga seem to be very content in the current state of their relationship: living separately but hanging out together when they have free time. In this *Wotakoi* resembles *Kuragehime*: marriage is no longer depicted as the epitome of either love or one's expected life path through society for women, as it often was in earlier josei manga (Itō 2010, 88). Nor is it the place into which manga first aspires to get to and then where it ends. But unlike *Kuragehime*, in *Wotakoi* marriage does not even enter the discussion. The focus being the leisurely depiction of an idealised life of Tokyoite 20 somethings in casual relationships, it seems *Wotakoi* serves as a place of fantasy for many, a dream of finding oneself a good companion from the same secret tribe of otaku and maybe as importantly without the pressure of marrying as a part of one's duty to society and parents. Nor are these love relationships unrealistically idealised true love like in *Watamote*, both relationships have different types of problems.

Not any otaku will do, though, as the dual couples of *Wotakoi* all are conventionally attractive and perform their gendered roles, if not perfectly, then at least adequately. None of them are in straight conflict with the gendered structure of Japanese society, apart from the distinct lack of the topic of marriage in the story, as it is often seen as the last step towards being a proper adult and the fact they are not made to shed their non-mainstream otaku identities for heterosexual prowess. Thus this mild resistance falls closer to the ambiguous resistance of gendered expectations by avoiding the topic altogether described by Rosenberger in her 2013 book, rather than any outright Butlerian subversion or straightforward challenging of the heteronormative matrix.

Itō also pointed out already in 2010 that the themes and topics of josei manga and older ladies' comics is much more varied than many English studies would lead one to believe, therefore

Kuragehime and Wotakoi both might not be as revolutionary as they might seem with only on a casual glance. Of course, the data of this study is very limited, but curiously the whole of Itō's book does not mention otaku, fujoshi or any kind of nerd identity at all in the entire book. Furthermore, as Wotakoi is not the most traditional josei manga, as it sprung from short comics made by an individual Pixiv artist who goes by the name Fujita (not much information is available of her, but she is shown to be a youngish woman in a Pixiv Comic promotional video (Pixiv, 2018)). Wotakoi seems to have been freer of editorial pressure at least on its early stages. The fact it sprung into such popularity tells us that it resonated with a wide audience.

5.4. Fudanshi

Last in the gendered nerd categories is the fudanshi, a biologically male existence, who enjoys the stereotypically female oriented homoerotica of Boys' Love or BL, yaoi and the like. None of the stories are made as self-biographical accounts of real-life fudanshi, even if Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu emulates a more self-biographical tone. These are just as idealised depictions of men set apart from the heterosexist masculinity as in the heterosexually orientated romance manga analysed before. There are two general types of fudanshi in my data, ones who experience same sex desire also outside of the manga they read and others who act and/or identify as heterosexual.

5.4.1. Fudanshi in same-sex love

In the boys' love manga Sasaki to Miyano, the original closeted and self-identified fudanshi is Miyano. He is a femininely pretty first year high school student in an all-boys school, who secretly reads BL manga. Apart from his less than masculine outward appearance he manages to fit into the masculine mold of teenage boys rather well within the world of the story. He has friends, few of whom are even aware of his identity as a fudanshi, and feels no great agony over being in the closet. He does not get bullied of his feminine looks and slender build either, apart from light remarks here and there.

He is befriended by a second year student Sasaki after he rushes to Miyano's aid to stop a fight that has broken out in the yard of their school. The relationship starts on the surface as just a friendship while in secret Sasaki has found Miyano attractive from the first moment he saw Miyano (from the behind, at that! His exact thoughts are: "The backside looks cute, but... That is a man, right. He even has pants on." Harusono vol. 1, 31), the fact Miyano is male hinders his attraction for quite some while.



Figure 15 The difference in size and demeanour between Sasaki and Miyano. Holding true to BL beauty standards neither can be described as overtly masculine. Sasaki to Miyano volume 3 page 98

Sasaki is soon introduced to the world of BL when he pesters Miyano into lending him manga, and to Miyano's surprise Sasaki does not react negatively to the homoerotic comics given to him. While he never starts to consider himself a fudanshi, Sasaki does venture rather deep into the world of BL while battling with his emotions towards Miyano. Outwardly Sasaki is more masculine of the two (but definitely well within the frames of BL style prettiness, shown in figure 15 above): he is tall and acts assertive, he has pierced ears and dyed hair which makes him seem scary, like a junior

delinquent. His personality is anything but delinquent-like though, he is kind, outgoing and curious. He fails in masculine bodily prowess as well, getting his own ass kicked by the same bullies he stopped when he jumped to Miyano's aid (Harusono vol. 1, 69-76).

For Miyano liking BL is something that needs to be kept as a secret from the wider world, a source of shame. Sasaki on the other hand seems to be confident enough to feel no threat to his masculinity or reputation in either reading BL or shōjo manga (the buying of which is even harder than BL for the fudanshi Gucchi, for example), he even defends BL as a genre very outspokenly to a classmate who finds him reading BL. To Sasaki the lure of BL is the stories of same sex desires is just that, they are stories which could not be told as heterosexual romances. (Harusono vol. 2, 22-23). Miyano's fudanshi tendencies are gradually revealed to wider and wider audiences, but after initial shock on both sides Miyano faces little ostracisation, nor a threat of violence due to his non-normative identity. The attraction of BL for Miyano is never extensively discussed, he recounts accidentally stumbling upon it when mistakenly buying a dōjinshi anthology and from there on slowly immersing himself in this world, but what exactly he likes in it is not revealed (Harusono vol. 1, 102-103).

Neither Sasaki nor Miyano explicitly identifies as gay or even bi, Miyano even states emphatically he is not gay to Ogasawara, a friend of Sasaki's, who thinks one must be gay to be a fudanshi. While making this assertion Miyano also refuses feelings of romantic love towards Sasaki (Harusono vol. 2, 93). This stance in identification is not refuted, not even after their mutual feelings for each other slowly turn into serious enough they no longer can be ignored. Miyano tries to desperately deny his feelings clinging to the memory of a girl he used to like in middle school (ibid. 100), unlike Motoi from *Mashita no fudanshi-kun* he never thinks reading BL has changed his sexual orientation. Miyano suspects that Sasaki only likes him due to his feminine looks and the fact there are no girls readily available in an all-boys school. This notion is challenged with many of the boys having girlfriends from other nearby schools.

Nor could Miyano's idea be further from the truth, in the vein of both *jun'ai* and BL tropes Sasaki likes Miyano for the person who he is, not because of his gender, sex or looks (but the last of which he conveniently finds very, very attractive). This trope has been widely criticised as erasing gay identities, as the boys falling for each other are "not gay" but just love each other and no one else regardless of gender (Ishida in McLelland et.al. 2015, 210-229, Lunsing 2006). While on the other hand one could see this trope as the ultimate ideal of love, one that transcends any notions of genders and essentialised sexual orientation (Nagaike 2011, 125). It takes Sasaki the whole of two

tankōbon volumes of battling internally with his romantic feelings for Miyano and confess his love (Harusono vol. 3, 18). The series is yet unfinished and the fate of the couple is yet unresolved, as Miyano has been unable to give his answer to Sasaki, whether or not he wants to date him. But as BL is strongly conventionalised and leans towards happy endings (Suzuki in McLelland et. al. 2015, 107), it is most likely the couple will come into terms with their feelings by the end and ends up happily together.

In *Mashita no Fudanshi-kun*, the non-fudanshi main character, Sokabe, identifies as a gay man. He is so shy and so deep in the closet he has never had any romantic or sexual encounters with anyone, despite desperately wanting to. Something of his mindset is revealed by the fact he chose his current apartment only because he found the grandson of the caretaker, Motoi, attractive and feels happy he can greet him every morning when going to work. (Kuroiwa vol. 1, 7) After Motoi's stash of hardcore BL is revealed Sokabe is momentarily elated thinking he has found a fellow gay man, only to find that Motoi is a fudanshi and thinks Sokabe is too (ibid. 14-18). This forces Sokabe back in the closet and into trying to pretend to be a fudanshi in order to avoid being outed and to form a closer relationship with Motoi. He does not perform the role well, and has to confess his feelings for Motoi rather quickly as the reason he has been pretending to be a fudanshi (ibid. 82-91). This begins their somewhat rocky path as lovers, as Motoi ponders over his own identity as a fudanshi who has turned into same sex desire also outside of his entertainment, and whether or not this makes him gay or not.

As for the performing of gender, Sokabe is a stereotypically diligent salaryman *shakaijin*, but has suffered from his non-normative identity to the extent he is almost incapable of touching anyone in a romantic context. In the beginning of the story he is lonely and desolate, deep in the closet to his coworkers and acquaintances alike. The younger Motoi a carefree university student, but one who also keeps his fudanshi identity hidden from outsiders. Their relationship does not come into direct conflict with the wider mainstream society, nor are there any scenes where the men a forced fight for their right to exist, either as gay men or as fudanshi in the case of Motoi. This is also typical for BL, which is often pointedly separated from the tedium and hardships of everyday reality and does not seek to achieve a critical societal commentary in its storytelling (Nagaike and Aoyama in McLelland et.al. 2015, 124-125)

Much in the vein of *Watamote's* suitors, Sokabe does have a hard time following the weird workings of a fudanshi brain. Motoi keeps having ideas and fantasies he has taken from BL, which seem

outlandish to Sokabe, for example wanting to have sex with him when he is sick and *because* he is sick, as the thought turns Motoi on (Kuroiwa vol. 3, 24-27). Often when Motoi meets fellow fujoshi and fudanshi friends the topics which they discuss are almost like a foreign language to him (Kuroiwa vol. 2, 65-66).

The biggest outside threat the couple faces are two other men, first being a heterosexual fudanshi Furuichi whom Motoi befriends. He turns out to be homophobic, for he hates same sex desiring fudanshi as they make all fudanshi seem like gay men in his opinion. This hatred leads him into a fight with Sokabe when Furuichi starts to suspect Motoi is gay, and angered Sokabe outs himself to him in order to protect Motoi. Sokabe confesses his love for Motoi, who barges into the scene and chases Furuichi off. Later, Furuichi returns to Sokabe to apologise for his careless words, he realises he has been no better than the girlfriends who dumped him because he is fudanshi in his hatred. Sokabe gladly accepts his apology, for he feels that Motoi and Furuichi share a very important friendship, the kind of which he cannot offer to Motoi as he is a gay man and not a fudanshi. (Kuroiwa vol. 3, 10-18) The difference between gay men and fudanshi is thus made explicitly clear in *Mashita no Fudanshi-kun*, there are no gay fudanshi. Even Motoi only briefly ponders if he is turning gay due to reading too much BL manga in the first volume as he starts imaging Blesque situations between him and Sokabe, but after that Motoi has no enduring identity crisis over his sexuality. The couple rather easily accepts Motoi is not gay but only desires Sokabe, as you do in BL (*Mashita no Fudanshi-kun* vol. 2, 85 and 125-126).

Another threat to the couple is an openly gay university senpai of Sokabe's, Shijō, who sets his sights on Motoi, even when he knows the couple is dating. Motoi gets a taste of masculine assertiveness, when the man tries to force himself on him (Kuroiwa vol. 3, 112-118). In this Shijō adheres to a negative stereotyping unfortunately common in BL, where the men who actually identify as gay are portrayed as villains incapable of love only lust and obstacles thrown onto the path of the main pair, who embody the "true love" (Ishida in McLelland et. al 2015, 220-221). The fact Sokabe himself is a gay man and anything but villainous redeems the representations given in the story to an extent, but Shijō is described as promiscuous and prone on doing reckless things like that still paints him as a less than desirable friend. The fact that Sokabe is an explicitly gay identified main character (i.e. depicted in a positive light) in a BL manga is also a part of a larger trend in recent BL where the representations of gay and bi men has started to diversify (Nagaike in Toku 2015, 69).

Motoi and Sokabe on the other hand fall rather prettily into the jun'ai trope of pure love, Sokabe has never had any romantic relations to anyone due to his mortifying shyness and fear of rejection due to his non-normative identity, and he later confesses Motoi is his first crush. The so far heterosexually identified Motoi also has had no relations with men prior to Sokabe. It is hinted he has had them with women, though, but such things are peripheral at best in BL narratives, as true love can only exist between men, but whom are not gay per sé as they only love each other and no other making their love transcendental (Nagaike 2011, 125).

Against what Nagaike recounts as fudanshi preference for cute and androgynous stories in her article on fudanshi (in McLelland et al. 2015, 195), Motoi is interested in hardcore pornography and is particularly interested in well drawn and preferably big penises (for example Kuroiwa vol. 1, 95), happily discussing these matters with Sokabe and others, often causing the shy man to almost faint in terror (Kuroiwa vol. 2, 79-81). He is also more assertive of the two, the seme, and eager to experiment with real life male-male sex with Sokabe. His crisis over suddenly desiring a real man outside of his manga fantasies is very short lived.

If one were to presume the reader is invited to automatically identify with the fudanshi character, as being more close to the assumed fujoshi reader, it is not indubitably so. In *Mashita no fudanshi-kun* the main point of view comes from the gay man Sokabe. In *Sasaki to Miyano* the internal struggles of both boys are delved into in detail and from both point of views. Again as the sample is small, no concrete conclusions can be made, but a more extensive study on the relationship between the fudanshi manga character and the fujoshi reader would indeed be interesting.

Furthermore, Miyano and Motoi differ as characters greatly. After an initial and short feeling of confusion about his newfound same-sex romantic feelings, Motoi is eager to explore the possibilities of same-sex sexuality while Miyano fervently refuses any possibility of having romantic feelings towards Sasaki for the most part of the series. Motoi and Sokabe progress in their relationship from kissing to anal sex by the end of the second tankōbon volume, thus growing quickly out of the jun'ai trope of pure, spiritual love without physical liaisons. Sasaki and Miyano on the other hand have not come into any definite conclusion with their relationship. They inhabit a world of pure jun'ai innocence, free of heterosexist and masculinist normativity, a space free of the compulsory toughness of masculinity in Japanese society, which many fudanshi readers find attractive in BL according to Yoshimoto's interviewee's (quoted in Nagaike in McLelland et.al. 2015, 193-194). It seems more than likely their pure love will culminate in a mutual confession of love and a happy

ending, without any need for a tragedy in the vein of *jun'ai*, but as the series is not over yet, a concrete conclusion cannot be done.

5.4.2. Heterosexual fudanshi

Gucchi and Daigo, the fudanshi friends in *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu*, do not get romantically involved with real-life men even if both enjoy reading of homoerotic encounters in manga. They are both closeted and keep up an appearance of a regular high school male when in presence of outsiders. Within their circle of friends, who are both normies and fujoshi, they have no qualms of going overboard with their enthusiasm with male same-sex erotica. Daigo is perhaps even more shameless than Gucci, for he draws a homoerotic *dōjinshi* of two of his schoolmates, Nakamura and Shiratori, and sells them in *dōjinshi* events. In fact, Gucci and Daigo meet each other when Gucci spots him selling these *dōjinshi*, getting angry at Daigo (mainly because he is himself included in the *dōjinshi*, though). The pair quickly make up as Daigo bribes Gucci with tickets to another event and he is grudgingly accepted as a member of Gucci's circle of friends. (*Michinoku* vol. 1, 118-120)

The concept of closetedness is a very vague idea within the series, after the initial depiction of Gucci's hardships in buying BL: the clerks thinking him to be a homosexual and fujoshi ogling him when he is trying to peruse the wares (*Michinoku* vol. 1, 3-10), not much attention is given to the pressure of mainstream society. This happens after Gucci finds rotten friends. Normative concerns fade into the background as all of the fujoshi and fudanshi characters are shown shouting about their interests rather openly wherever they go. The idea of fujoshi and fudanshi being hated and ostracized seems not to be an all-encompassing problem for Gucci, Daigo and Rumi, unless brought up in the context of heterosexual pair formation. There the thought of fujoshi and fudanshi not being dating material persists strongly. Nakamura, their normie friend, does often comment upon the weird ways of his friends, but he lacks any judgmental power over them.

While the series does not really delve into their sexual identities in extensive detail, Gucci and Daigo are not after love with fellow humans in the series, nor does a love that cannot be ignored it find them. Gucci's best friend Nakamura, who is not an otaku or a fudanshi, does wonder about Gucci's sexual orientation from time to time, prompting an angry comments from Gucci whenever the topic comes up in conversation (for example, *Michinoku* vol. 1, 10-11). Gucci violently refuses any possibility of him fitting in to the mold of either a gay or a bi man. On top of this, Gucci does have a vague crush on a girl he sometimes sees on the school grounds, but this is

later revealed to be the crossdressing okama-character Shiratori, making the attraction slightly complicated. But as Gucchi thinks the object of his desire to be a woman and the truth is never found out, it would hardly be conceivable to call this same sex desire (Michinoku vol. 1, 91-93). Gucchi also has a secret male admirer called Yamashita, who sits behind him in class, but he has not been able to convey his feelings to Gucchi, and has served mostly as a comic relief so far (Michinoku vol. 2, 72 & 114-115).

Gucchi also has a slight romantic tension with his newly found fujoshi friend Rumi after they meet, but it soon dissolves and the pair agree they can no longer see each other in a heterosexually romantic light, thus ending any possibilities of heterosexual love between the two (Michinoku vol. 3, 19). It is also not as if Gucchi would not want to have a girlfriend, he just feels that his fudanshi hobbies are currently much more important to him than love with another human (Michinoku vol. 2, 64-65). This is a problem the normie-fujoshi couple Serinuma and Mutsumi face, the many fujoshi events Serinuma attends does pose a real problem for the fresh love of the couple, putting Mutsumi under such heavy strain the couple almost breaks up (Junko vol. 13, 40-42). It is apparent that a romantic relationship between a fujoshi/danshi and a normie needs a lot of negotiation, and that is something Gucchi has no time for.

Daigo is depicted as very attractive, but he too, seems to be mostly uninterested in forming a romantic relationship with anyone, preferring to draw his dōjinshi instead. His sexual orientation is also never brought up in the course of the series, even if he certainly enjoys the attention of women, especially in the many dōjinshi events he attends as a seller. For these women his attraction only grows as he is a fellow member of the esoteric order of yaoi, but none of these girls approach him with heterosexual love relationship in mind.

Daigo's preferences in BL or a reason as to why he likes it are never brought up, but his dōjinshi are published as a part of the Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu manga. They are romantic in nature, but they do not differ in visual style from the rest of the series in any way. This in part a subversion of the expectations of the reader, who at first does not know the story they are reading has jumped from the reality of the series itself to the artistic reality of Daigo's dōjinshi; making it momentarily seem Nakamura and Shiratori are developing romantic feelings towards each other within the reality of the series.

Gucchi's tastes are not revealed either, but his gate into fudanshihood is described as similar to that of Miyano in Sasaki to Miyano, he accidentally bought a yaoi dōjinshi anthology not understanding its true nature, and getting hooked (Michinoku vol. 1, 136).

Furuichi, the fudanshi friend of Motoi in Mashita no Fudanshi-kun, on the other hand has had past relationships with women and is currently dating one. He is also older than the high schoolers of Fudanshi kōkō Seikatsu. To him his fudanshihood has caused a lot of heartbreak as a former girlfriend broke up with him due to his fudanshi tastes, calling him disgusting and accusing him of being homosexual in the process. He is also in the closet with his current girlfriend, stating that if he found out it would probably end in another break up. (Kuroiwa vol. 2, 82-83). He has a trauma and strong aversion towards same-sex desiring fudanshi who he feels are tarnishing the reputation of all fudanshi (he is privately labelled as a gay hater by Sokabe and Motoi after this outburst). In these experiences he shares the fate of Narumi, the fujoshi main character of Wotakoi, who has also suffered several breakups due to being outed as a fujoshi. He fervently wishes that his friend Motoi would also be a heterosexual, and when he finds evidence on the contrary he is shocked and angry enough to lead the trio into a fight. Afterwards Furuichi realises he has been just as bad as his ex-girlfriend who dumped him only due to being a fudanshi in his hatred towards gay fudanshi and he apologises to both Motoi and Sokabe (Kuroiwa vol. 3, 15-17).

He is also generally in the closet, only being able to share his fudanshihood with Motoi and Sokabe (whom he thinks to be a fellow fudanshi at first). Outwardly he too, is a conventionally attractive and well-groomed man.

Last, there is Mejiro-sensei from Kuragehime, who maintains a pretense of being a female BL mangaka for the duration of the whole series, only to reveal himself as a man in the last chapter of the manga. He has hidden himself away in Amamizukan under the pretense of severe phobia of social situations, since the whole boarding house is female only. A rule he himself enforced when he moved in, as he fell in love with the caretaker of the building, Chieko the kimono wearing doll otaku, and wished to keep rivals from entering the house. In the process he made courtship impossible for himself, and had to hide for many years within the house. As his true biological sex is revealed, along with that of Kuranosuke, the crossdressing beauty, to the Amāzu (Tsukimi of course already knew Kuranosuke's secret) they revoke the rule against men, welcoming the male tenants to Amamizukan. (Higashimura vol. 17, 141-147)

The reason behind Mejiro-sensei's bluff was heterosexual desire from the start, therefore, he is a clear example of a man who needs not to be gay in order to enjoy BL. The exact nature of his sexual identity apart from loving Chieko is not revealed, nor is his relationship to BL delved into in detail. Apparently he has been drawing it for years, but his motivations are not elaborated upon. It is mentioned earlier in the manga, that Mejiro-sensei has also published traditional shōjo manga during his career, when he was trying to "hide her true nature" as Chieko puts it (Higashimura vol. 14, 140).

He is depicted also as clearly older, with a slight beard and long hair, a step away from the bishōnen-esque beautiful men in the other fudanshi stories. But he is by no means ugly either, especially his big eyes evoke the feel of a beautiful boy (see the pictorial appendix of characters). So, he does not he embody the hegemonic masculine ideal of a man either, as a mangaka he has already rejected the normative salaryman ideal. Furthermore he has remained single and cooped himself away from society rather completely, especially during his stay in Amamizukan. He fits right in with the otaku women who have rejected the hegemonic heteronormative structure of Japanese society, and together with them and the other men who are eager to move into the Amamizukan: Kuranosuke (who by crossdressing has refused a political normative career) and Kai Fish (who has lost his masculine ideal job as the CEO of his international clothing firm, but is the current owner of the house), they will form a more heterogendered safe haven apart from the rigorous expectations of mainstream success.

Mejiro-sensei stands apart from all the other fudanshi characters too, same sex desiring and heterosexual alike, he tries not to fit in but carves his own path. Just like the otaku women of Amamizukan, who have also rejected the notion of pretending to be someone they are not in order to fit into society.

5.4.3. Comparisons between the types of fudanshi, and with fujoshi

All fudanshi in the data begin the story in the closet, even if Mejiro-sensei is in the closet in a different sense than the others. Most of them stay in there in the bigger societal context for the duration of their stories, even if they might come out to some selected friends. Outwardly they fit into the normative mold of masculinity, to an extent at least. The most aggressive tough guy type of masculinity does not even exist in these shōjo manga worlds after all. Or when it does, it is reserved for the antagonists. Neither do the fudanshi embody any of the stereotypical negative

stereotypes tied with otaku identities: lack of personal grooming, unruly bodies and disregard towards “proper” social etiquette. Rather they are all depicted as beautiful, slender and attractive, and also capable of functioning in the public sphere. Mejiro-sensei being the only one to deviate from this mold, but unlike the others he does not exist to please the eye of the reader at every turn of the page. Nothing in any of the men poses a threat to women, fujoshi or otherwise, either, unlike some depictions of otaku men in my data.



Figure 16 Miyano shares his homoerotic fantasies of Hirano with Hirano himself, who is not pleased. Sasaki to Miyano volume 1 page 66



57

Figure 17 The fudanshi Gucci spots possible homoerotic behaviour in his vicinity. *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* volume 1 page 57

What sets these fudanshi apart from their female comrades is the fact that there is less ugliness tied to their preferences when they show their enthusiasm towards male-male erotica, for example when Miyano fantasises a gay relationship between his friend Hirano and Hirano's roommate, Kagiura, he does not turn into a disgusting monster. Rather he just looks focused, sometimes with a few stars floating around his face to symbolise his intense imaging (see figure 16). Similarly, Motoi's fudanshi fantasizing does not cause his body to turn ugly, he too gets a sprinkle of sparkles

and a focus in his look when imagining homoerotic encounters. Gucchi on the other hand sometimes does turn into something uglier when having homoerotic fantasies, but *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* leans more on a similar mode of body modification humour as *Watamote*, see figure 17. Furthermore, these transformations towards ugly caricaturization are not only tied to having homoerotic thoughts. The series is also not BL, and thus Gucchi does not need to fulfil a similar aesthetic role as the BL fudanshi do, to please the eye of the reader to the same extent. That being said, he does not deviate from the pretty mold of the other fudanshi in any other way.

The fudanshi characters are also represented as inhabiting a peripheral space in the fujoshi world of homoerotica, as they are creatures who are also in danger of evoking fujoshi lust. Most fudanshi in the series are generally apprehensive about going to bookshops to buy BL manga, especially with male friends, mostly out of fear of catching the attention of fujoshi (*Harusono* vol. 1, 38, *Michinoku* vol. 1, 5-6). Similarly the relationship between Sokabe and Motoi is a subject of immense curiosity from the part of Motoi's fujoshi friends. Gucchi is only fully initiated into the wider fujoshi world after meeting Rumi and her sister, and no mention of for example attending *dōjinshi* events is made in *Sasaki to Miyano*. Nevertheless, fujoshi and fudanshi can certainly be friends, even good ones, but the danger of becoming subject material for fujoshi fantasies never seems to vanish. But as mentioned earlier, the notion of romance between fudanshi and fujoshi is deemed impossible within the data. There remains much to be studied, preferably with bigger and more generic sample of Japanese women's comics.

6. Conclusion⁵²

The situations and developments the many otaku, fujoshi and fudanshi meet in the stories is so varied, no singular conclusion can be drawn for all the different identities represented in the manga, but there are definitely similar currents running through most of the series. Especially, the fact that none of these outsider identities face erasure and dissolution into the heterosexual mainstream in order to be cured of an outsider identity, not by love nor by friendship. All of the stories take a sympathetic stance towards their subjects in this sense. That being said, most of the characters are in the closet and remain so for the duration of the stories, this holds especially true for fujoshi and fudanshi, the otaku women of *Kuragehime* are set apart from the rest rather clearly as they have

⁵² At the end, I must thank my good friends Netta Lagus and L. Ahti for their invaluable help in editing and proofreading this thesis and Homer L. for his relentless support throughout the writing of this thesis.

rejected society much more thoroughly than the other characters. The ending of *Kuragehime* is also the most subversive, throwing out the idea of compulsory marriage to achieve a classic happy end, preferring to leave a possibility for love to exist outside of marriage too. And the possibility of a lack of love too.

The non-normative sexual desire of fujoshi is not desirable in a woman, but can be overcome if the male seeking a heterosexual relationship with her can overcome it. In the shōjo story *Watashi ga motete dōsunda* the relationship between Serinuma and Mutsumi ends up as a blissfully happy marriage with a child. The josei demographic stories *Kuragehime* and *Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii*, either outright refuse such conformist plots or just avoid them altogether. This being said, there is a rising trend of fujoshi motherhood in manga depicting the lives of fujoshi, as pair of fujoshi siblings have also been raised by a fujoshi mother in *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* and with Serinuma becoming a fujoshi mother. Cross generational fujoshihood is of course already very possible in Japan as the earliest shōnen ai stories were published already in the 1970s. Notions of marriage do not enter the discussion either in the fudanshi stories, apart from a distant dream of finding a partner who would understand the niche identities in *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu*, the same sex couples do not breach the subject at all. The notion of all nerd identities being less than preferable romantic partners persists throughout the data, and is certainly not limited to only the fujoshi, but they are shown in the most negative light of all the three categories, with monstrously ugly sexuality.

The representation of otaku men is dualistic, as they are either shown as antagonistic, in *Watamote*, or as preferable love partners for fujoshi, in *Wotakoi*. The antagonistic otaku embody the worst possible stereotype of otaku men: they are ugly, unkempt and completely unworthy of love. In this they differ from the fudanshi immensely, who are all closeted, i.e. hide their non-normative identity, and are outwardly pretty and well groomed, fitting neatly into the heteronormative matrix outwardly. This being said, most of the fudanshi presented in the manga studied are objects of an aesthetic pleasure for the reader, not attempts at realistic representation. Even *Gucchi* and *Daigo*, the fudanshi of *Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu* are drawn pretty, even if they are not presented to form a homosexual relationship to please the reader.

The eligible male otaku and their non-otaku brethren in love relationships with fujoshi and otaku women are represented as ideal men: calm, understanding, not overtly sexual and good looking, and lastly, as loving the person for who they are not only for the attractive outside shell they possess. They embody the ideal of pure love, or *jun'ai*. Shōjo and josei manga are of course mainly wish

fulfilment entertainment, so such an ideal is no big surprise. However, the women who end up together with these men do not end up being subjugated by love and giving up their own identities with it, thus making these depictions of non-normative women positive in the sense that they give more room to dissident identities within the heteronormative matrix of Japanese society, at least for the readers of these comics. Curiously in this context, is how the possibility of a fudanshi-fujoshi heterosexual pairing is presented as an impossibility in the two cases where it could have happened. First, fudanshi Motoi and fujoshi Ichii assert that their differences in taste for BL and yaoi made their romantic relationship impossible and second, fudanshi Gucchi and fujoshi Rumi feel a romance between them impossible as they have become rotten comrades. The BL stories on the other hand, have less societal commentary within them, preferring to skirt away from the problems faced by same-sex desire within Japanese society. Nevertheless, the fudanshi and gay characters are depicted mostly positively and face no dire consequences due to their deviation from the heteronormative matrix, which holds true to BL tropes. In the BL stories the assumed female reader is also not automatically given the fudanshi character to identify with, as could be expected with the fudanshi being psychologically closer to the reader with their shared interests. The point of view character of the stories is not the fudanshi in neither of the BL manga, even if in Sasaki to Miyano the internal workings of the fudanshi Miyano are also delved into.

All in all, the stories do sketch out a rather positive picture of non-normative nerd identities, which would hint at a more general acceptance of these sort of non-mainstream people, much in the vein of how nerds have been able to shed some of the negative stereotyping they have received in the west (Freedman in Galbraith et.al. 2015, 136-137). Of course, with a sample this small it is impossible to make any kind of definitive conclusions, a bigger sample of manga would be needed to see if these preliminary findings are consistent, as the manga I used in my data are certainly not the only contemporary manga with otaku, fujoshi and fudanshi as main characters. The fudanshi-fujoshi romantic incompatibility presented in the two cases where such a pairing could have been possible and representation of fudanshi within and outside of BL are two especially interesting prospects of future study, as is the notion of the ugliness of fujoshi sexual desire. The data hints that the representation of fujoshi desire has evolved from a ghastly monstrosity to a more mundane depiction, but a wider study would be needed to make any sort of definitive conclusions. This study has been put a tiny scratch on the surface of girls' and women's manga focusing on the othered nerd identities of Japan. Much remains to be discovered in their representation both within the

realm of girls' and women's manga and also beyond. For now as always Japanese societal changes and struggles are reflected in them, even if not always intentionally and straightforwardly.

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8. List of Figures

Figure 1 The cover of Kuragehime volume 1. Characters pictured from top to bottom and left to right: Banba, Jiji, Chieko, Mayaya, Kuranosuke and Tsukimi.....	27
Figure 2 The cover of Watamote volume 3. Characters pictured from left to right: Shinomiya, Mutsumi Asuma, Nishina, Serinuma, Igarashi and Nanashima.....	28
Figure 3 The cover of Wotakoi volume 1. Characters pictured are Nifuji Hirotaka and Narumi, the main couple.	29
Figure 4 The cover of Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu volume 1. The character pictured is the main character Gucchi.	30
Figure 5 The cover of Sasaki to Miyano volume 2. The characters pictured are Sasaki and Miyano, the main pair of the series.....	31
Figure 6 The cover of Mashita no Fudanshi-kun volume 1. Characters pictured are Motoi and Sokabe, the main pair of the series.	32
Figure 7 Kuranosuke, Tsukimi and Chieko meet Nomu, the doll otaku. Kuragehime volume 6 page 46.....	36
Figure 8 The Amāzu before and after Kuranosuke's transformation, the characters on the top panel from left to right are: Jiji, Mayaya, Chieko, Banba and Tsukimi. Kuragehime volume 2 page 104.	40
Figure 9 The Amāzu's natural beauty. Characters on the top panel: Nomu, Banba, Chieko and Jiji. Kuragehime volume 17 page 127.....	44
Figure 10 Naoya and Kō meet for the first time. Wotakoi volume 3 pages 88-89.....	45
Figure 11 Serinuma transforming back to her fat form in Watamote volume 3 page 84.....	50
Figure 12 Fujoshi desire turns the beautiful Serinuma and Nishina into vacant eyed idiots sprouting nonsense. Watamote volume 13 pages 24-25.	54
Figure 13 The fujoshi OL Koyanagi and Narumi disagreeing on the seme/uke structure of a pairing. Compare to figure number 12. Wotakoi volume 3 page 32.	56
Figure 14 Ugly and threatening otaku sexuality in Watamote volume 9 page 30.....	70
Figure 15 The difference in size and demeanour between Sasaki and Miyano. Holding true to BL beauty standards neither can be described as overtly masculine. Sasaki to Miyano volume 3 page 98.....	76
Figure 16 Miyano shares his homoerotic fantasies of Hirano with Hirano himself, who is not pleased. Sasaki to Miyano volume volume 1 page 66.....	85
Figure 17 The fudanshi Gucchi spots possible homoerotic behaviour in his vicinity. Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu volume 1 page 57.....	86

9. Vocabulary Appendix

Aniwota	アニヲタ	An otaku focusing on anime, i.e. Japanese animation
Atashi	あたし	A decidedly feminine I-pronoun used by people who wish to emphasize the femininity
Bishōnen	美少年	Literarily a beautiful boy, an androgynous creature that combines both feminine and masculine traits, but are usually thought to be male, rather than female.
BL	ボーイズ・ラブ	An abbreviation of boys' love, is a type of manga drawn by women to female readers where the focus of the story is homosexual love between beautiful men or boys.
Bushidō	武士道	Way of the Warrior, the code and ideal by which was constructed in Edo period Japan as a code for samurai to live by. It is also a strong cultural myth in Japan in for example in the ideal of a salaryman the "corporate warrior"
Freeter		A person refusing to or not managing enter a proper salaryman (or woman) career, instead working in part time or low-pay jobs.
Danshi	男子	men, males
Dōjinshi	同人誌	Literally a self-publication, usually in comic or prose form. Most often this term is used in relation to fan parodies of popular series made by fans, which are often but not always pornographic in nature. Dōjinshi are created by both male and female otaku, the latter being usually known as fujoshi by virtue of making them and much of the dōjinshi created by women are indeed homosexual in nature.
Fudanshi	腐男子	A male version of the fujoshi in its most common sense e.g. a man interested in boys' love manga, anime and / or dōjinshi
Fujoshi	婦女子	A Japanese word denoting a girl or a woman, the base from which the rotten girl fujoshi is derived by switching the first kanji meaning a lady or a woman to that meaning rot or decay.
Fujoshi	腐女子	A rotten girl/woman or a female nerd. Most often this term relates to women focusing on BL e.g. stories homosexual relationships of beautiful men, or some other form of female oriented geekiness. It is a wordplay of a word meaning ladies and girls, but with a fu-pronounced kanji switched to one meaning rot.
Gachiota	ガチヲタ	"serious otaku" a term referring to suit clad salaryman otaku
Geewota	ゲーヲタ	Gee stands for games, e.g. a gamer otaku. In the context of this study these games refer to videogames
Gekiga	劇画	"Dramatic Pictures" a style of Japanese comics born in the 1970s in contrast to manga, it emphasized on adult, gritty themes and had a drawing style that can be described as more realistic.
Hiwota	非ヲタ	non-otaku person, also known as a normie, someone who lives a mainstream life apart from the hidden world of otaku
Ichininmae no shakaijin	一人前の社会人	A full, responsible adult e.g. a person who has a steady job and is married, if he is man, and a housewife if she considered a woman





Josei manga	女性マンガ	Japanese comics aimed at an adult women demographic, generally from 20 to 40 year old readers.
Jun'ai	純愛	Pure love, an idealised romance emphasising the emotive side of love and not physical liaisons between the would be lovers. Popular in romantic TV, literature etc. See Sonia Ryang 2006
Karesen	枯れ専/カレセン	A young woman attracted to older men
Karōshi	過労死	Death by overwork, a phenomenon where salarymen and sometimes Office Ladies too work themselves to death by doing voluntary overwork, sometimes for many hundreds of hours per month.
Lolicon	ロリコン	A genre of mainly manga where infantilised and sexualised females are main focus, often, but not always pornographic in nature and usually made by men for other men.
Kifujin	貴腐人	A derivation of fujoshi, denoting an adult woman who likes BL etc. It is a similar rottification as fujoshi where the fu-pronounced word for ladies is switched to the kanji meaning rot
Kōhai	後輩	Junior at work or school, hierarchical relationships are important in Japanese workplaces and schools and senpai-kōhai relationships hold much importance
Mangaka	マンガ家	A person who writes and / or draws manga
NEET		Abbreviation of Not in Employment, Education or Training, refers to a person who lacks any of the aforementioned, and is often thought to young and in need of assistance to get back into society.
Okama	お釜	Most often used to refer to an effeminate homosexual man or a male-to-female crossdresser, which represents the most common stereotype of a homosexual in Japanese entertainment and mainstream thought (McLelland 2000a, Lunsing in McLelland and Dasgupta 2005). There is also a connotation of prostitution and being the receiving partner in anal sex linked to the term.
OL		Abbreviation of Office Lady. Stereotypically a young woman who works in a white collar job before getting married
Ore	俺	A Japanese I pronoun, which is a very colloquial and masculine way to refer to oneself. Most men in the manga studied use this pronoun of themselves when in company of peers
Ore-sama	俺様	A masculine and extremely pompous way to refer to oneself, not in general use
Oshare	おしゃれ	Stylish, or a stylish person, can be used both as a name for a group of people and as an adjective to describe fashionable things.
Otaku / wotaku	オタク/ヲタク/おたく	In theory a gender neutral term that relates to a person defined as a geek or a nerd, but usually refers to a male nerd. It is also a very general term encompassing all the possible focuses one's geekiness might have, be it trains, jellyfish, dolls, boys' love manga or Mercedes Benzes
Otakujoshi	オタク女子	A term for a female nerd, that emphasizes the fact that she is a girl nerd, as opposed to the perceived standard male otaku






Otakuonna	オタク女	A term for a female nerd, that emphasizes the fact that she is a girl nerd, as opposed to the perceived standard male otaku
Otokoyaku	男役	A male role performer in the all-female revue and theatre Takarazuka
Rediisu Komikku / Ladies' Comics	レディーズ・コミック	Comics aimed for adult women, married and mothers in particular. Sometimes hetero-pornographic in nature.
Ren'ai	恋愛	spiritual love, idealised love that is not tied to physical sexuality and is often virginal see Deborah Shamoon 2012
Ryōsai kenbo	良妻賢母	"Good wife, wise mother" the catchphrase of an ideal woman during Meiji- and Shōwa-eras
Seme	攻め	Literarily: the attacker. In BL and yaoi denotes the dominating and penetrating partner in the male-male relationship
Senpai	先輩	A senior member of a group, one's superior in hierarchy
Shōjo manga	少女マンガ	Japanese comics aimed at young girls as readers.
Shōnen ai	少年愛	Literally Boys' Love, but often refers to the first stage of female oriented homoerotica from the 1970s: psychological and often dark love stories of adolescent bishōnen in exotic far away locations.
Shōnen manga	少年マンガ	Japanese comics aimed at young boys as readers. In truth people of all ages as social stratas enjoy reading shōnen, it is the most popular type of manga
Shufu	主腐	A derivation of of fujoshi, means a rotten housewife e.g. a married woman who is also a fan of BL and/or yaoi etc. It is a similar rottification as fujoshi where the fu-pronounced word for ladies is switched to the kanji meaning rot
Taipu	タイプ	A loan word but one that is often used in Japanese in the context of what one wants in a romantic / sexual partner, or a homoerotic coupling or in an anime character to fawn over.
Tankōbon	単行本	A comic book where several chapters of a manga published in a manga magazine are collected.
Tetsuota	鉄オタ	Train otaku, an enthusiastic fan of trains. Stereotypically thought to be a male
Uke	受け	Literarily: the receiver. In BL and yaoi denotes the passive and penetrated partner in the male-male relationship.
Washi	わし	A Japanese I-pronoun, stereotypically denotes an elderly male speaker, and is used in manga extensively to mark older men
Watashi	私	Standard, gender neutral I-pronoun
Yaoi	ヤオイ	A term that in Japan usually refers to homoerotic dōjinshi, e.g. fan parodies or amateur manga, it is an abbreviation of yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi "no climax, no punchline, no meaning" signifying the general content of such publications. Outside of Japan the term is in wider use, sometimes referring to the entire world of boys' love comics



Yōkai	妖怪	An umbrella term denoting all sorts of monsters from Japanese folklore. Not necessarily evil, but creatures to be wary of, as they are stronger than humans and alien.
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10. Pictorial Appendix of the characters in the data




Kuragehime






Picture:	Name:	Nerd identity:	Relationships:
	Kurashita Tsukimi	Jellyfish otaku / Amāzu	Friendship: Amāzu Romantic: Koibuchi Kuranosuke & Shuu and Kai Fish
	Chieko	Doll otaku / Amāzu	Friendship: Amāzu, Nomu Romantic: Mejiro-sensei (has a crush on her)
	Mayaya	Three Kingdoms otaku / Amāzu	Friendship: Amāzu Romantic: Hanamori pursues her when she acts as a model
	Jiji	Fan of elegant old men / Amāzu	Friendship: Amāzu Romantic: N/A



	Banba	Train otaku / Amāzu	Friendship: Amāzu Romantic: N/A
	Mejiro- sensei	BL mangaka / Amāzu	Friendship: Amāzu Romantic: Chieko
	Koibuchi Kuranosuke	N/A	Romantic: Tsukimi Brother: Shuu Friendship: Befriends the Amāzu during the course of the series
	Koibuchi Shuu	N/A	Romantic: Tsukimi Brother: Kuranosuke Friendship: N/A
	Kai Fish	N/A	Romantic: Tsukimi Friendship: N/A

	Hanamori	Fan of Mercedes Benzes	Romantic: Mayaya Friendship: N/A
	Nomu	Doll otaku	Friends: Chieko Romantic: N/A



Watashi ga motete dōsunda





Picture:	Name:	Nerd identity:	Relationships:
 	Serinuma Kae	fujoshi	Friendship: A-chan Romantic: Igarashi, Nanashima, Mutsumi Asuma and Kazuma, Shinomiya, Nishina, Mitsuboshi
	A-chan	fujoshi	Friendship: Serinuma Romantic: Boyfriend (never seen in the series)

	Igarashi Yūsuke	N/A	Friendship: Nanashima Romantic: Serinuma
	Nanashima Nozomu	N/A	Friendship: Igarashi Romantic: Serinuma
	Mutsumi Asuma	N/A	Friendship: everyone Romantic: Serinuma Brother: Kazuma
	Shinomiya Hayato	N/A	Friendship: N/A Romantic: Serinuma
	Nishina Shima	fujoshi	Friendship: N/A Romantic: Serinuma

	Mutsumi Kazuma	N/A	Friendship: N/A Romantic: Serinuma Brother: Asuma
	Mitsuboshi Takeru	N/A	Friendship: childhood friend of Serinuma Romantic: Serinuma


Wotaku ni koi ha muzukashii

Picture:	Name:	Nerd identity:	Relationships:
	Momose Narumi	fujoshi	Friendship: Koyanagi, Kabakura, Naoya Romantic: Hirotaka
	Nifuji Hirotaka	gamer otaku	Friendship: Kabakura, Koyanagi Romantic: Narumi Brother: Naoya




	Koyanagi Hanako	cosplayer and fujoshi	Friendship: Narumi, Hirotaka Romantic: Kabakura
	Kabakura Tarō	anime otaku	Friendship: Hirotaka, Narumi Romantic: Koyanagi
	Nifuji Naoya	N/A	Friendship: Narumi, Kō Romantic: Kō(?) Brother: Hirotaka
	Sakuragi Kō	gamer otaku	Friendship: Naoya Romantic: Naoya (?)





Sasaki to Miyano

Picture:	Name:	Nerd identity:	Relationships:
	Miyano Yoshikazu	fudanshi	Friendship: Kuresawa, Hirano Romantic: Sasaki
	Sasaki Shūmei	N/A	Friendship: Hirano, Ogasawara Romantic: Miyano
	Ogasawara Jirō	N/A	Friendship: Sasaki, Hirano Romantic: fujoshi girlfriend (never seen in the series)
	Kuresawa Tasuku	N/A	Friendship: Miyano Romantic: fujoshi girlfriend (never seen in the series)
	Hirano Taiga	N/A	Friendship: Sasaki, Kagiura, Ogasawara Romantic: Kagiura (has a crush on him)






	Kagiura Akira	N/A	Friendship: N/A Romantic: Hirano
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Fudanshi kōkō seikatsu

Picture:	Name:	Nerd identity:	Relationships:
	Gucchi	fudanshi	Friendship: Nakamura, Daigo, Shiratori, Rumi and Yumi Romantic: Yamashita has a secret crush on him, likes a girl he sees sometimes at school (in truth crossdressing Shiratori)
	Nakamura	N/A	Friendship: Gucchi, Shiratori, Rumi Romantic: N/A
	Shiratori	N/A	Friendship: Nakamura, Gucchi, Rumi Romantic: N/A

	Nishihara Rumi	fujoshi	Friendship: Gucchi, Nakamura, Daigo, Shiratori Romantic: N/A Sister: Yumi
	Nishihara Yumi	fujoshi & cosplayer	Friendship: Gucchi Romantic: N/A Sister: Rumi
	Daigo	fudanshi	Friendship: Gucchi, Rumi, Nakamura Romantic: N/A
	Yamashita	??	Friendship: N/A Romantic: Gucchi

Mashita no fudanshi-kun

Picture:	Name:	Nerd identity:	Relationships:
	Sokabe	N/A	Friendship: Shijō Romantic: Motoi
	Motoi	fudanshi	Friendship: Furuichi Romantic: Sokabe
	Inushima	fujoshi	Friendship: Motoi, Tomonaga, Ichii Romantic: N/A
	Tomonaga	fujoshi	Friendship: Motoi, Inushima, Ichii Romantic: N/A
	Ichii	fujoshi	Friendship: Motoi, Inushima, Tomonaga Romantic: N/A

	Furuichi	fudanshi	<p>Friendship: Motoi</p> <p>Romantic: girlfriend (never seen in the series)</p>
	Shijō	N/A	<p>Friendship: Sokabe</p> <p>Romantic: Motoi</p>